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by Bruce Cordell

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by Matt Forbeck

With the end of the Last War less than a year behind them, soldiers from the lost nation of Cyre join two Brelanders in an exploration of the Mournland. Only a swarm of angry fireballs stands in their way.

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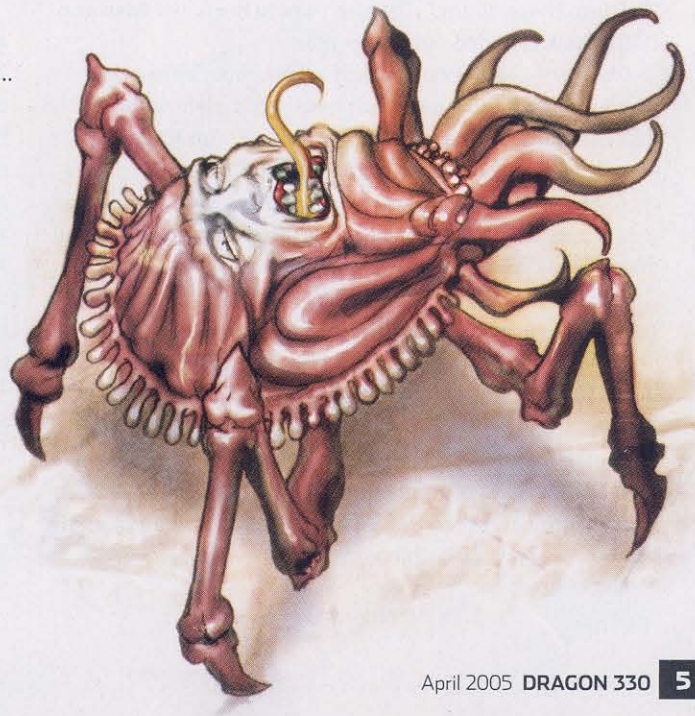
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THAT'S NOT FUNNY!



When I inherited *DRAGON* magazine, I had a number of important questions that needed immediate attention. How do I manage to finish the current issue? What should we put on next month's cover? Just who are these assistant editors, anyway? But one question produced much more dread than the others, as it must have for all previous *DRAGON* editors—what the hell am I supposed to do for the April issue?

Long-time readers are no doubt aware of the origins of this quandary, but I'll explain a bit for those of you who are just joining us. Way back in issue #36 (April, 1980), Editor Jake Jaquet and staff surprised the readers with "*DRAGON* 36 1/2," an April Fools section of the magazine that included fake letters to the editor, monster statistics for the DM (Special Defenses: "I Quit," or "You're Dead") and a Keebler elf, an adventure module consisting of a single empty room, and a deliriously unfunny parody of the Sage Advice column in which all of the questions were about sage. The herb. Get it?

The following year brought another "1/2" joke issue, this time with the first in what would become a long, long, long-running trend—funny D&D song lyrics set to the tune of a popular ditty. In this case, Roger E. Moore dropped by with a little number called "Red Dragon Blues," sung to the tune of "Folsom Prison Blues." Stats for Popeye the Sailor-Man and Daffy Duck rounded out the section.

DRAGON'S 144th issue marked a milestone, as its cover proclaimed a "spring swimsuit issue," complete with a fat Valkyrie riding an unhappy flying mule. Editor Roger E. Moore, he of the funny song lyrics, flexed his editorial muscle to bring us more than 20 pages of puns, cheating tips, a game in which players make and destroy clay monsters, and dumb spells from the "Misbegotten Realms."

Pretty much annually since then, the staff has treated *DRAGON* readers to humorous issues. Roger's joke songs became an ongoing series called "Bard on the Run." Editor Dave Gross and the magazine's current publisher, Keith Strohm, teamed up to present an abomination called "Gangsters of the Underdark," which featured such puntastic characters as Sir Elliot of Kness. (I assure both Keith and Dave, who will probably read this, that I mean "abomination" in the most loving sense possible.)

And on and on.

The readers haven't always appreciated the joke. At one point in the early 1980s, Kim Mohan actually had to take a break from frivolity because readers flooded the *DRAGON* offices with letters of complaint regarding some fake letters to the editor. Other editors have decided to focus on utility over hilarity, completely eschewing the laffs in favor of more prestige classes and magic items. My three predecessors all conspired to produce last year's April Fools effort, a Ninjas/Pirates/Dinosaurs epic that will forever stand the test of time with the perfect balance between usefulness and jokiness.

So in the face of all that history, what sort of high ribaldry does the current staff have to offer this month? For DMs, we have "Into the Far Realm," by Bruce R. Cordell, a delightfully devious overview of how to implement cosmic horror in a D&D game. To some DMs, the only thing funnier than a dead PC is an insane one, and the Far Realm offers plenty of opportunities for both. Players will appreciate the jester, a new prestige class by Richard Pett, whose adventure "The Devil Box," in *DUNGEON* #109, was one of the most amusing scenarios we printed last year. We're hoping you all like the other jokey surprise we've hidden in the latter half of the magazine.

It's not "Crit Me Baby, One More Time" to the tune of a Britney Spears song, but it'll have to do—at least until next April.

ERIK

Erik Mona
Editor-in-Chief



LETTERS

Tell us what you think of this issue. Send an email to **scalemail@paizo.com**. Please include your name, city, and state.

FLASH IN THE PAN

I am writing in to comment on your magazine. First, I'm not a big fan of flashy graphics and coverlines hogging the cover. I happen to like the "open" style. I will say, however, you *do* do flashy well and I do appreciate that. I have recently gained a healthy respect for flashy while running my EBERRON campaign based in Sharn. Speaking of which... I *would* like some more campaign-specific material. Specifically, anything in EBERRON would be fantastic! I remember when this setting first came out and I was dead set on not playing this campaign. As you can see, I've altered my decision. Oh, I'm all up for the giant EBERRON map mentioned in the "More Maps, Please!" letter printed in issue #328.

Bazaar of the Bizzare... good. Magic Shop... bad. Nice work on switching back to the original name for the column. If the young'ns don't know what a "bazaar" is they can look it up. No offense, young'ns. It's easier than ever to look something up (**dictionary.com**).

I loved the "Flaws for Nonhumans" article by Richard Pocklington. Flaws are just great in the game as well as in reality. It's what makes us beautiful. It just so happens that D&D flaws give you something in return. On that note, don't be afraid to delve into traits (*Unearthed Arcana* 86) as well. If readers are liking the flaws, they'll like more traits as well.

I've been quite fond of Class Acts. Again, I love the class-specific flaws. Keep it up.

Not a big fan of your Silicon Sorcery articles. I'm glad though that you kept it down to two pages.

All in all, you guys rock. I want to acknowledge your dedication to what we all love and cherish.

William Bryan
Portland, OR

Thanks for the kind and thoughtful letter, William. There's no question that EBERRON has attracted a faithful throng of new fans, and this issue offers two articles of significance to enthusiasts of the latest D&D setting. Keith Baker's "Umbragen" is merely the first of several from the setting's creator that will appear in these pages this year. We're also pleased to present "Coming Home," our first EBERRON short story. Look for a FORGOTTEN REALMS short story from a high-profile Realms author in our blockbuster September Realms extravaganza (#335).

As for not liking the cover image muddled up with logos and words and stuff, I'm happy to report that we'll soon be running unadulterated cover images within the magazine, most likely beginning next issue.

MOUNTLESS PALADINS, PLEASE

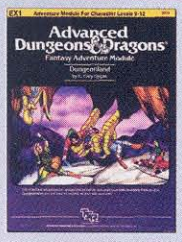
Love the Class Acts section of the magazine. It expands upon many of the ideas of *Unearthed Arcana*, one of my favorite gaming books. Any chance you could do an article on paladins with alterna-



KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Question:
What are the magic words?

BLAST FROM THE PAST EX1 AND EX2





Just how deep *does* the rabbit hole go?

Although published separately, 1983's *EX1: Dungeonland* and *EX2: The Land Beyond the Magic Mirror* really comprised two halves of a single whole. You could play through the overarching adventure from either side (or play either half alone). EX1 began with the characters falling down an impossibly long tunnel lined with miniaturized magic items, dropping the party into a dangerously wacky Lewis Carroll-inspired realm. EX2 put the characters in a Victorian house replete with a mirror that led to a nearby section of the same extraplanar domain.

Because of its obvious literary genesis, the EX dyad provided D&D players with some interesting challenges and cool encounters based on some of the more famous scenes from the Alice books, such as the Smilodon Cat (think Cheshire) and the Mad Hatter and March Hare (both human-ish monks with additional deadly powers). Despite their bizarre nature, the adventures introduced new creatures, magic items, and spells that later became part of the general D&D experience, such as the *deck of illusions*, *hat of disguise*, and the *aid* spell.

Have you ever run EX1 or EX2 in your campaign? Has your DM ever dropped your unsuspecting characters into this wacky realm of train-wrecklike horror? We'd love to hear from you! Email us at **scalemail@paizo.com** and let us know your experiences following Alice's footsteps.

tive abilities for not taking a mount? For example, extra feats, a dedicated weapon that advances with the paladin, and so on. It's been a frequent subject on many of the message boards.

Thanks for your consideration!

Seth
Via Email

As a long-time paladin player, I agree that such an article would be a perfect fit for Class Acts. Horses and even more exotic mounts often seem to get in the way in a dungeon environment, and I too would love to see some trade-offs for players who would prefer something else for their holy warriors. We don't currently have such a submission, and invite the readers to send us their ideas on the topic.

DM TEACHER

I am a high school math teacher who has an after school gaming club. I have about 10 students who game twice a week (one student also runs a game). Last year, I had about 20 students who gamed regularly (some every day at lunch!). No matter how badly my day is going, I always feel great after a gaming session with my students. I am proud to be introducing the next generation to hacking and slashing.

Jennifer Wiebe
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

And we're proud to have you as a reader, Jennifer. I learned the game in an after school environment, and have been playing strong ever since. Those kids in your class might not know it now, but you're helping them learn how to imagine—a gift they'll benefit from their entire lives. In case they don't thank you enough, allow me. Thanks!

DEAD SETTING OFFICE PART 1

Just writing to say that I would like to see some material for Zakhara, Maztica, and Kara-Tur in the near future.

I've been using the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting since shortly after the release of second edition, and the non-Faerûnian parts of the world were always the most interesting to me.

Zakhara, in particular, is a setting that really didn't get enough time in the sun, and I would really enjoy a third edition version of the rules for Maztican pluma and hishna magic.

These sub-settings were rife with ideas, and it looks like no new material will be forthcoming in the foreseeable future. So I appeal to *DRAGON* magazine to fill the void. You guys have never let me down before.

Henry Eshleman
Fairbanks, Alaska

DEAD SETTING OFFICE PART 2

I would love to request more articles updating Kara-Tur and Zakhara to 3.5.

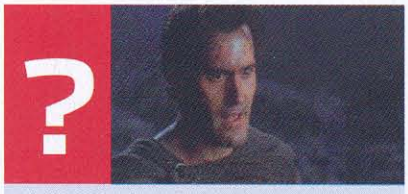
These are fondly remembered

PLANE TRIP

Dragon Talk

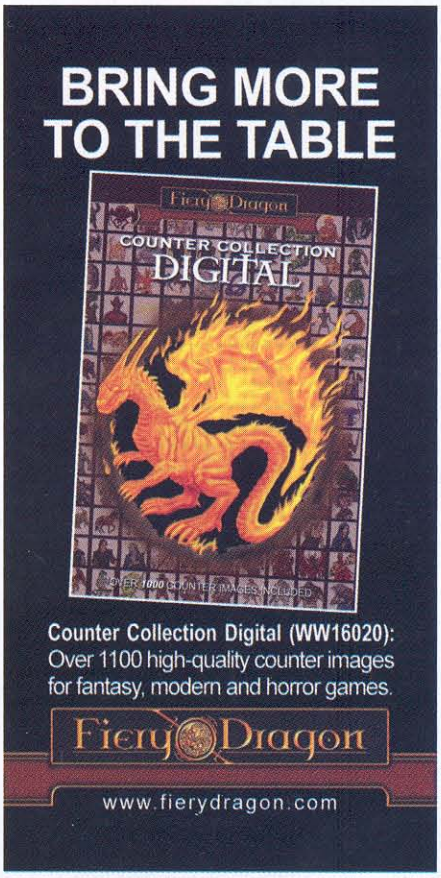


Sandman: The Dream Hunters, *Vampire Hunter D*, and *Final Fantasy* all owe their artistic genesis to one visionary: Yoshitaka Amano. Now, the world renowned artist and award-winning creator of such powerful works explores a world of his own in a new series of comics simply titled *Hero. Chapter One: From New York to Paris* introduces the *Hero* protagonist (known only as Hero) and Amano's fantastical interpretation of the modern world. Hero journeys across continents, oceans, and bizarre alternate planes in pursuit of a long-lost love who might or might not have betrayed him. Along the way he encounters fascinating beings while discovering and developing his own unique abilities. If all this sounds a bit too cerebral for a comic book you're right: *Hero* is produced in a half prose/half art format. Even if you're intimidated by highbrow adventure and world-class art, you might want to check out Amano's work: it's perfect fuel for the imagination and sure to spark ideas for your own epic multiplanar campaign. For more on *Hero*, check out **speakeasycomics.com**. *–Mike Fehlauer*



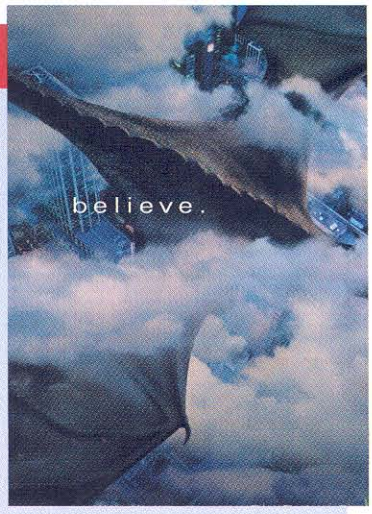
KNOWLEDGE CHECK ANSWER

Answer: Klaatu! Barada! Uh... uh....



THE DRAGON HUNTER

Dragon Talk



Here there be dragons! Animal Planet explores off the usual charts with their first special on mythical creatures, *Dragons: A Fantasy Made Real*. The premier show airs Sunday, March 20th, from 8:00–9:30 P.M. (EST). Also, as an added bonus, the narration is by Patrick Stewart!

Animal Planet takes advantage of the graphical expertise seen in shows like *Walking with Dinosaurs* (on sister network Discovery Channel), featuring the same CGI techniques to envision an Earth where dragons act like natural creatures that mate, dispute territory, and rear their young. Using a scientific approach, the show imagines how dragons evolved, how the different adaptations of various dragon species would enable the fittest to survive, and how they might compete against humankind.

Sounds like many D&D campaigns, doesn't it? You might think about upping your special effects budget by playing a clip from this show during your group's next dragon encounter.

Still not enough dragons? Then plan on watching *Dragons: The Magic Behind the Scenes*, which will run from 9:30–10:00 P.M. (EST) after the main feature. If you want to see more specials like this on other mythical animals, be sure to let them know at **discovery.com**. Who knows? DRAGON readers might convince them to launch the Fantasy Channel. *–Shelly Baur*

campaign settings for me, and I would be thrilled to see some articles or adventures supporting them in future DRAGONS or DUNGEONS.

Articles that I would find of particular interest: something detailing the Spirit World plane and divine realms of Kara-Tur deities that was hinted at in *Player's Guide to Faerûn*, details of the politics and cultures of Kara-Tur, maybe one of the great cities of Kara-Tur with a map, dungeon sites of Kara-Tur, and maybe even an update of the monsters from the Kara-Tur *Monstrous Manual Compendium*.

As for Zakhara, it would be cool to see articles or adventures concerning genies, new prestige classes, spells, details about cities, lost magic, or ancient dungeons.

I run a couple of campaigns in the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting, so Realms-lore of any kind is always appreciated.

I am not yet a subscriber to DUNGEON or DRAGON, but I have been buying every issue religiously off the stand for the last couple of years at my local gaming shop (Dragon's Lair, here in Austin, Texas). Some of my favorite articles lately were the updates you did to old campaign settings. I even used your RAVENLOFT update in a recent campaign I ran. I especially enjoyed the DARK SUN update you spread across both DRAGON and DUNGEON.

Gray Richardson
Austin, Texas

Enough time has passed that I can now look at DRAGON #315 (our dead campaign setting issue) with objective eyes. The issue sold better than most, generated far more mail than most, and is one of our most popular in terms of back issue sales. Fans of Maztica, Kara-Tur, and the rest can sleep easy in the wake of this success. It now appears that the "Campaign Classics" theme will be an annual event for the foreseeable future. When that happens (look for it in the winter of 2005), you can be sure we'll include some content for the late, lamented far corners of the FORGOTTEN REALMS.

MISSING ARTICLE PART I

My largest problem with issue #328 is not what as in it but rather what was not in it. It was clearly stated in the earlier issue that you would have an article called "Generating Character." Where is the article? I was looking forward to this. A friend and I are teaching some 3rd to 6th graders how to play D&D, and articles like this one are very helpful and fun for them. I have several other charts that I can use for this purpose. I was hoping to get them to get this chart so they can start their own library of such charts.

If you had not said the article was going to be there I would have been fine. It is very annoying when someone says that they are going to deliver something and then fails to do so. If you are going to fail to deliver for whatever reason a quick apology in the editor column or any place would be nice. Perhaps a statement to say when, if ever, the article will appear would be even better. If you have a magazine that you sell wrapped in a bag and you are not honest about what will be in the following issue, it is very unprofessional. I am certainly glad I did not tell the kids to go out and buy that issue for that article. I had thankfully decided to read it before recommending it.



KNOWLEDGE CHECK ANSWER

Answer: Necta... uh... nectar... necktie... uh....

I have read several editorial columns and answers to letters saying how much you are improving the magazine. May I suggest that you step back and go to the basics? Deliver what you say you will and if you are unable to, apologize.

Tom Starkey
Via Email

Sorry about the mix-up, Tom. In case this and other similar issues haven't made it completely evident, those "coming next issue" boxes are not the word of God. In the month between when we put the sidebars together and when we actually send that issue to the printer, a whole lot can happen, including blown deadlines, problems getting an article up to snuff, or unanticipated ad sales or article overruns. In the case of the "Generating Character" article, we just didn't have enough room to fit it in, a problem that became apparent shortly after we started actual work on that issue. Since the article was written by the DRAGON *staff, we simply put it on the back burner, and will print it in a future issue. I apologize if this caused problems for you or for your young players.*

MISSING ARTICLE PART 2

I'm generally well pleased about your magazine, and have been a buyer for more or less 6 years. However, in issue #327 I was really disappointed when I couldn't find the article about the Farseer series that was advertised in *DUNGEON* #119.

Call me stupid, but I had waited three weeks for that article and didn't even bother to check if it was there before buying that issue.

Is there a possibility that it will end up in another issue?

Nicolas Robinson
Montréal, Québec

PS: Keep up GREYHAWK!

When it rains, it pours, apparently. Is this the right time to mention that the Perdido St. Station *Novel Approach, touted last month, didn't make it into this issue? See the response above to discover how we can get ourselves into pickles like this. The Farseer article is finished and ready to go, and will be appearing in the near future.*

MONDO SAGE

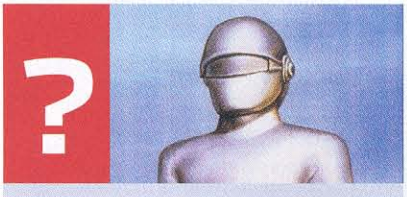
I've been a *DRAGON* subscriber for a very long time. One of the things that always kept my attention during the years is the Sage Advice column, which was always interesting to read and very informative, even when the rules used by our group are not always standard or up-to-date (2 vs. 3 vs. 3.5, for example). This treasure trove of lore and information is perfect, except for one point: I cannot carry dozens of *DRAGONS* to my gaming table. Here is my suggestion/request: how about printing, either hardbound, softbound, or electronically as PDF files, all the Sage Advice columns published for second, third, and 3.5 edition, in indexed sections so DMs and players alike can have a copy at hand for play?

Please continue the great work.

Sylvain Robert
Québec, Canada

That's a bit of a tall order for our current technological capabilities, Sylvain, but we'll definitely keep the idea in mind. By the time you read this, plans will already be in motion to offer out-of-print DRAGON *issues in PDF format at* ***paizo.com****. It's possible that some sort of giant Sage Advice compilation might happen eventually, but we currently don't have any plans to publish it.*

As for what we do have plans to publish, watch this space in the next few months.—Erik Mona



KNOWLEDGE CHECK ANSWER

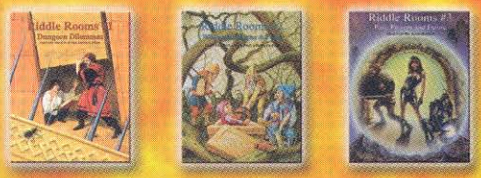
Answer: Klaatu! Barada! Nikto!

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Cloud Kingdom Games
This issue's Riddle:

When used in ones, just to adore,
We grace the ear and hand.
When each of us connects two more,
We form a sturdy band.
When each is linked to neighbors four,
We form an armor grand.
And when we're carried off to war,
The blade we can withstand.

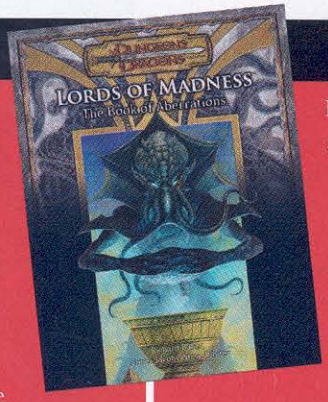
Get a new riddle each week in your email. Sign up at: riddles.CloudKingdom.com
Find the riddle answer in our other ad in this issue

For more riddles and games visit us at www.CloudKingdom.com/Dragon

reported by Shelly Baur, Dale Donovan, Mike Fehlauer, and Mike L. Fiegel

PREVIEWS, NOTES, AND NEWS FOR GAMERS

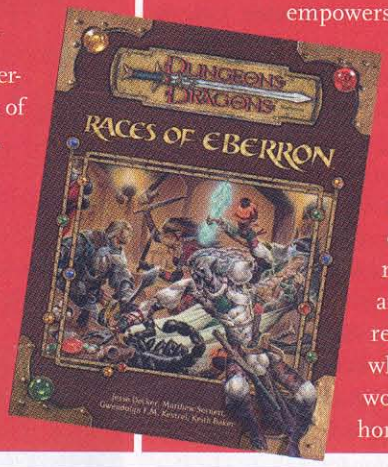
NEW RELEASES



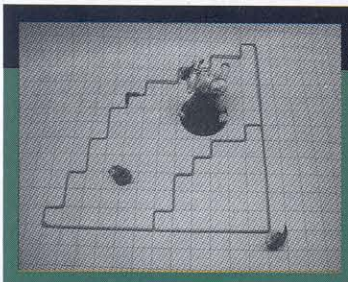
Inspired by nightmares and all things unspeakable, *Lords of Madness* draws on Lovecraftian themes of inscrutable alien beings and horrors beyond space and time. This 224-page sourcebook focuses on aberrations in the same way the *Draconomicon* explored every aspect of dragons, but with a particular concentration on aboleths, beholders, and mind flayers. New variations, tactics, feats, nasty magic items, and spells add variety to these iconic monsters, as well as many lesser aberrations.

In addition, PCs who hate these fiends can arm themselves with a variety of potent prestige classes, including the specialized aberration hunter. *Lords of Madness* promises to be a terrifying addition to Wizards of the Coast's monster series, drawing on the twisted imaginations of D&D veterans Rich Baker, Steve Winter, and Dungeon's own James Jacobs. For more aberrations, check out the Ecology of the Chuul on page 60 of this issue. *–S.B.*

Not just for EBERRON gamers, this races book enables you to transport changelings, kalashtars, shifters, and warforged into any campaign. Written by former *DRAGON* editors Jesse Decker and Matthew Sernett, veteran Wizards of the Coast designer Gwendolyn F. M. Kestrel, and EBERRON creator Keith Baker, *Races of EBERRON* brings to light deep historical and cultural material for these compelling peoples, as well as new feats, magic items, and spells for each race. Providing these races with new versatility, *Races of EBERRON* expands and empowers the rules presented in the *EBERRON Campaign Setting*, giving your characters new abilities and options regardless of what campaign world they call home. *–S.B.*



HARDWIRED SPELL TEMPLATES



Don't you hate trying to figure out spells with conical areas of effect? Thanks to Steel Sqwire's new steel-wire templates you can finally stop counting squares and balancing templates on your minis. The cones come in both straight and diagonal orientations for 30-foot and 60-foot spell effects, allowing you to place them right on your mat to determine just where spell effects end without interfering with play or obscuring the mat. Easily portable and designed in several colors, get all of your *cones of cold* and breath weapons at **steelsqwire.com**. *–D.D.*

NEXT MONTH IN DRAGON

DRAGON #331



DRAGON gives you the best in gaming, presenting new official rules, original game content, great advice, and the perfect inspiration for your D&D game. In each issue, you'll also see what cool products are on the horizon, find out what other players are up to, and get an insider's look at the industry. Get more from your game: Get *DRAGON!*

The Point of Pole Arms

by Ari Marmell

The awl pike, lucern hammer, and bec de corbin make their return to D&D in this expansive article. Guaranteed to take you back to the day when a 10-minute argument would erupt over which was which, and more importantly, which was better.

Alchemical Charms

by Yury Pavlotsky

Got a werewolf problem? Pick up a silver charm. Vampire eyeing up your neck? Try a garlic draught. These new alchemical items give you an edge against some of the most diabolical monsters D&D has to offer.

New Uses for Old Equipment

by Mike Mearls

Tired of all that gear that's not doing you any good? Turn your winter blanket into a deadly trap, set up a trip line with your trusty rope, or lay bait with those stale trail rations. Explore all the possibilities to turn your mundane gear into extraordinary gear.

Fast, Furious, and Fantastical

by Frank Brunner

Cruise the dungeon inside your very own beholder-mobile. Ride a carpet of living vermin, glide through the dunes in a sand boat, or sail the seas on a haunted ship. A dozen new vehicles await, as well as some old favorites.

Plus!

The Ecology of the Green Hag, A Novel Approach: *Spiderwick*, and of course, Class Acts, Bazaar of the Bizarre, First Watch, Scale Mail, Sage Advice, and comics.

MIND FLAIR

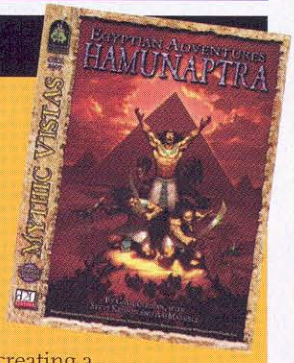


This month *Dragon* is giving away free stuff! Thanks to the mad hatters over at Genki Gang (**genkigang.com**), and our lovely model Jason Bulmahn, we're giving away this one-of-a-kind tentacled horror hat! What's it supposed to be? Maybe it's your favorite brain eating aberration. Maybe it's an elder god from a reality beyond. Ultimately, who cares? It's keeping your head warm. All you have to do is correctly answer the following three questions tying into this month's themes of levity and preternatural horror:

1. How many Class Acts are in this issue of *Dragon*?
2. Which animal hat does **genkigang.com** claim makes you a better *Street Fighter* player?
3. According to *Lords of Madness* (releasing this month) what is an aboleth's favorite food?

Once you find the answers send them, along with your name and address, to **contest@paizo.com** by June 1st. In August we'll announce the answers and the contest's winner right here and ship off someone's hat just in time for the winter months. Best of luck!

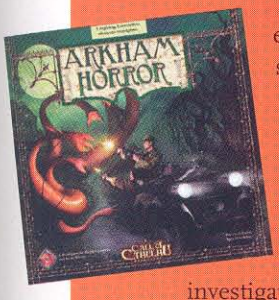
ADVENTURE UNWRAPPED



Filled with dead gods, awesome monuments, and terrible magic, ancient Egypt is the perfect setting for classic D&D adventure. Green Ronin scratches the mummy itch with *Egyptian Adventures: Hamunaptra*. Three books come in an old-school boxed set: a book of crunch (feats, races, classes, magic), a book of fluff (a gazetteer for the continent of Khemti), and a book of secrets (DM-only info). This isn't just D&D with a little extra sand. The authors did their homework in creating a setting with majesty, magic, and mystery worthy of Ozymandias. *–M.F.*

A CTHULHU CLASSIC RETURNS

The town of Arkham is beset with unspeakable horrors, besieged by monstrous creatures, and bewildered by the origin of the evils that surround it. Can a small group of investigators save the town from the coming cataclysm?



Fantasy Flight Games (**fantasyflightgames.com**), publishers of *Twilight Imperium* and the d20 Legends and Lairs series, is proud to present the return of the *Arkham Horror* board game. Originally published nearly two decades ago by Chaosium, Inc., this revised edition features the same heart-in-your-throat atmosphere but adds plenty to scream about: new Anders Finer artwork; an extensive graphical facelift; and a new *Arkham Horror* rules set from the game's creator, Richard Launius, designed to give each investigator a unique twist. No Cthulhu fan in their right mind (if there's such a thing, given their propensity for insanity) will be able to resist the call of... oh, you know. *–M.L.F.*

DUNGEON THIS MONTH

Dungeon #120



The World of D&D Poster Map (4 of 4)

The fourth and final giant poster map by all-star cartographer Robert Lazzaretti reveals the infamous Causeway of Fiends, the beleaguered Duchy of Tenh, and the trackless lands of the Snow Barbarians. At last, *Dungeon* readers can chart our core D&D adventures on a world map fit for kings!

Fiend's Embrace

by Stephen S. Greer

Ages ago, the demon prince Graz'zt fashioned a cloak, the *Fiend's Embrace*, from the skin of a pit fiend and offered it as a gift to his lover, the witch queen Iggwilv. Today, rumors claim that the *Fiend's Embrace* is hidden in a ruined keep in the Cold Marshes—will agents of a jealous demigod get to the cloak before the PCs? A D&D adventure for 4th-level characters.

The Styes

by Richard Pett

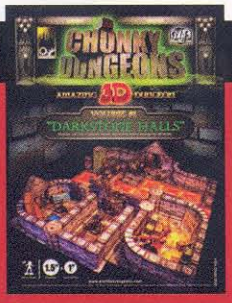
Once, the Styes was the ocean gateway to a major city, her magnificent buildings crowning a man-made island held aloft on piers and boardwalks. Now, it has grown old and diseased, a perfect haven for sadists, cultists, and hungry things that flop and writhe. A D&D adventure for 9th-level characters.

Secrets of the Arch Wood

by Skip Williams

A few years ago, the swords of Archendale went ahead with plans to log a section of the Arch Wood near their borders. Yet only a year later, the logging stopped abruptly—Archendale's rulers did not reveal the reason, but that reason is about to make itself known. A Forgotten Realms adventure for 13th-level characters.

DUNGEONS: SMOOTH VS CHUNKY





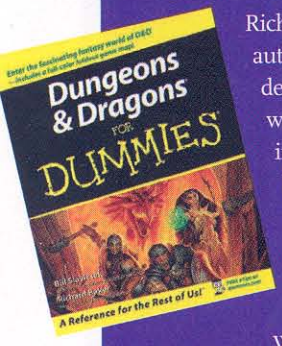


Want to add some dimension to your dungeons? Well, WorldWorks Games (**worldworksgames.com**) has what you need.

The company's newest release, *Chunky Dungeons 1.5*, offers over 55 items which allow you to customize and "dimensionalize" your dungeon mats. Further, these tiles and walls can be added to the dungeon scene as the PCs reach them, preventing canny players from gaining details their heroes would have no way of knowing.

This release also delivers the first 3-D cardstock dungeon tiles with curved walls. Also included are walls, archways, "plain" stone and ornate floor tiles, stairs, treasure tiles, a walk-in fireplace, a log bridge, and many props garnered from earlier releases, all packaged in this all-in-one product. Finally, get your minis actually *in* the game! *–D.D.*

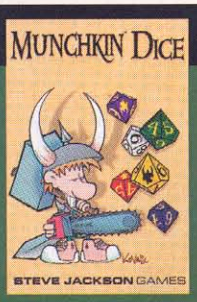
THE PERFECT GIFT FOR THAT "SPECIAL" SOMEONE



Rich Baker, senior game designer at Wizards of the Coast and co-author of the new book *Dungeons & Dragons for Dummies*, describes it as a "great book to make you a better D&D player, whether you're a novice or an experienced player who wants to improve his game." The 384-page primer is divided into five broad sections: an intro to roleplaying and D&D, a large section on character building, playing tips (including a much-needed primer on table etiquette), basic DMing (including a sample adventure), and finally the Dummies' trademark "Part of 10's," filled with lists like "10 Best Low-Level Monsters," "10 Best Wizard Spells," and so on. There's an honest-to-goodness need for a book like this, but we expect more than a few get bought and stuffed into backpacks to be presented to that guy at the convention who casts *fireball* at the red dragon and "forgets" to chip in for pizza. *–M.F.*

MUNCHKIN WEAR





Let your inner munchkin embrace you with the new Munchkin T-shirt, imprinted with John Kovalic's artwork. This shirt, hasn't been the only addition to the world of *Munchkin* in recent months. Expanding the game by 14 more cards, the new *Munchkin Dice* pack includes a set of 10-sided dice, each branded with a "munchkin head" number 10. Steve Jackson Games has also produced *Clerical Errata*, a set of 56 misprints, erm, very valuable collector cards for use with *Munchkin*. If you think you can do better, submit your best ideas online at **sjgames.com/munchkin/game**, where you can pick up all of these *Munchkin* related items. *–S.B.*

MINI OF THE MONTH



Guns, goggles, and magical machines set the Iron Kingdoms campaign world apart from the crowd when it debuted in 1999. However, these very features make it difficult for players to find accurate representations for their characters—pistol-packing elves just aren't commonly found in a typical game store's miniatures aisle. Privateer Press responded to IK roleplayers' demand with character and creature minis drawn from the unique art in their Iron Kingdoms sourcebooks as well as from the award-winning *Monsternomicon*.

This Ogrun miniature is a perfect example of Privateer's new Full-Metal Fantasy miniatures line. The unique body features, unusual weapons, and piecemeal armor immediately identify him as straight from Privateer's original setting: he's a mean looking mamba jamba, armed with a wicked double-bladed polearm and a large-bore hand cannon. The artistic style of the mini is itself enough to make most want to take a look at the popular Iron Kingdoms setting. Even if you're not ready to brave that new world you could use this guy as a champion half-ogre bodyguard or an elite orc myrmidon. The gun is a pretty big anachronism in a core D&D game, but it's easily converted into a club (paint it brown) or crossbow (add the prod and string). *–M.F.*

ORIGINS/DRAGON MAGAZINE PRESTIGE CLASS DESIGN COMPETITION

Got an interesting prestige class you'd like to share with the world? Origins and *Dragon* magazine have teamed up to present the Origins/*Dragon* Prestige Class Design Competition, an open call inviting readers of this magazine to pit their favorite original prestige class against all comers. The author of the best prestige class (as determined by judges from Origins and *Dragon*) will receive an "all-expenses-paid" trip to this year's Origins International Game Expo, which takes place June 30 to July 3rd at the Greater Columbus Convention Center, in Columbus, Ohio. You'll have a front-row seat to special writing seminars, a seat at the Guest of Honor banquet, and will get to play in a special event with other contest winners. Plus, we'll print your submission in our August issue, with an illustration by a top fantasy artist.

Two runners up will receive free four-day passes to this year's show and a seat at the special game event and writing program.

We're looking for fun, innovative design featuring concepts that have not been seen in the pages of *Dragon* or elsewhere. Surprise us, and you might be on your way to the preeminent game-playing consumer convention in North America.

Check out the prestige class notes in the *Dragon* Writers Guidelines at **paizo.com/dragon**. Entries will be judged for creativity and rules balance. Please limit entries to one submission per person. The contest is open to residents of the United States, Canada, and Mexico only. Submissions must be in English, and must be provided in electronic form. All submissions must be accompanied by a signed Standard Disclosure Form, as found in the Writers Guidelines. All submissions must be limited to 4,000 words or less, including the prestige class advancement chart.

Mail contest entries to:
Origins/*Dragon* Writing Contest
GAMA
280 North High Street, Suite 230
Columbus, OH 43215
Or send via e-mail attachment to:
programs@gama.org

All entries must be received by 4/25/05 to be considered eligible.

RPGA UPDATE

by Ian Richards
RPGA Program Manager

Close to two years ago we started a new form of RPGA Campaign play. We dubbed it a "cycling" campaign where it starts and finishes in a two-year period before changing to a new cycle, which may or may not be the same setting. It gave us a way to provide a campaign that felt like the old epic adventures of first edition. As you might know, the first cycle, *Legacy of the Green Regent*, is coming to a close. The concept was to produce a campaign that you could always drop into no matter what happened to your character. This feature was highly successful, but we wanted more. We had ideas and with the new campaign, now is the time to make a few new adjustments. Firstly, *Mark of Heroes* is set in the Eberron campaign world. Secondly, we wanted to allow GMs more interaction and room for creativity, thus we'll be providing GM mark adventures. Namely, it's your adventure written by you, run by you, and it counts for play and rewards.

Now, GMs everywhere can start running their own adventures begining in March 2005 under the guidelines set out on the RPGA website. March also sees the release of the first two *Mark of Heroes* adventures made available for game day and home play. All sound confusing? Checkout **rpga.com** for the latest news on *Mark of Heroes*, ordering and sanctioning, and our other upcoming projects.

NEW SETTING NEW ADVENTURES

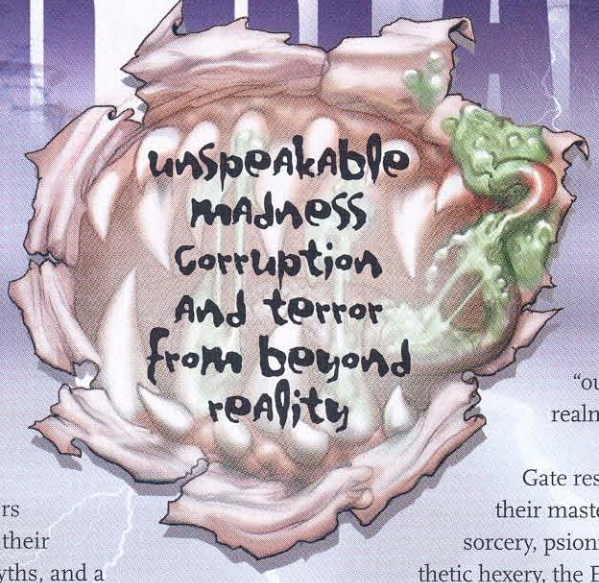
February also saw the D&D Retail kits refresh to the new campaign setting. Eberron is proving to be so popular it makes sense to move the content over to the *Mark of Heroes* campaign. For those who are frightened that this spells the doom of their *Legacy of the Green Regent* characters, fear not. *Legacy of the Green Regent* adventures will all be available for download, at no cost, in our ordering system. You can continue your adventures right up to the campaign close later this year. Content for *Legacy* will still be featured at all the major shows we participate in, including Origins and Gen Con Indianapolis in 2005. So don't mothball those characters just yet.

That's about it for now. In next issue we'll take a look back at some of the highlights of Winter Fantasy, taking place for the first time in the nation's capital, Washington D.C.!



by Bruce R. Cordell • illustrated by David Bircham

Enter the FAR REALM



Vague legends recall the vaunted tasks and mighty accomplishments of the Elder Elves, a recondite culture that thrived ages ago. Those Elders are gone, and all that remains of their works are fragmented stories, myths, and a terrible legacy.

Far Realm History

The Elders were awesome thaumaturges who sought to understand every facet of the planar cosmology they inhabited. Their research pried into many areas, but they were especially interested in establishing the ultimate theory of planar portals and gates. Not satisfied with the mundane expanses of intraplanar (or even interplanar) distances, the old ones created an entirely new arcane science that allowed them to bridge the far distances between parallel worlds separated by shadow.

Establishing permanent gates to nearby planes was a fabulous accomplishment for the Elder Elves, but in the flush of their success they dreamed greater dreams. They soon became dissatisfied with the subjectively limited ability to span mere "distance" as was possible with their so-called world gates. With a new fire of determination, they set to work on their greatest gate of all: the Vast Gate. It was the old ones' goal to fashion a passage that could bridge all distance and push "outside" creation, to the theoretical realm of timeless infinity.

In the inner sanctum of the Vast Gate research facility they constructed their masterpiece. In a world-shaking feat of sorcery, psionics, science, and celestial sympathetic hexery, the Elder Elves empowered a gate that punched through reality as it was commonly understood and into the Far Realm, a place so distant in space and time that it was not originally part of the cosmology of worlds and planes. The Vast Gate opened into a universe with its own closed geometry, a universe once separate, but no longer.

Entities inhabited the newly breached geometry, but only by the slimmest margin could these monstrosities be defined as "alive." Herculean minds immersed themselves in contemplations so alien that reality itself was warped and shaped in their presence. It was a vista whose contents could not be contained within the limited confines of a mortal mind. The lunatic might of these incomprehensible beings changed space in horrid, unaccountable ways by their very presence. Lethal contradictions and toxic natural laws were born at whim, only to dissolve like vapor to make way for newer, more insane dreams. This space was incomprehensible even to madmen, and to the rational Elders, the implications of such potent power unchecked rocked the very foundations of their understanding of the multiverse. When the entities

ORIGINS OF THE FAR REALM

The Far Realm was first introduced in the adventure *The Gates of Firestorm Peak*, published by TSR in 1996. Since then, bits and pieces of the Far Realm have appeared in various D&D adventures and sourcebooks well into third edition. In fact, so popular was the Far Realm that Wizards of the Coast incorporated it into the Realm of Xoriat in the *Eberron Campaign Setting*.

A realm of horror, madness, and Lovecraftian geometries that blast the mind of any unfortunate enough to encounter residents of that plane, or even the mere residue of the plane's existence, is a topic rich in possibility—a topic that goes beyond being contained in a single campaign setting.

Those interested in incorporating aspects of the Far Realm into their games will find that the features described in this article can be utilized in whole or in part.

beyond the gate began to stir toward the hole leading back to reality, the Elder Elves realized the magnitude of their mistake.

Before the facility could shut the gate, a Far Realm entity seeped through, thereby permanently establishing a connection between the cosmology of the known and that which had previously been forbidden.

The Vast Gate was eventually closed, but despite efforts to stamp out all contact with the realm "outside," a casual linkage remains. Knowledge of the Far Realm persists in the multiverse even now, and that knowledge alone is sufficient to maintain the connection.

Cerebrotic Blot

Sometimes the Far Realm touches the world, and when such contact occurs, reality is stained. When the stain persists, such locations are sometimes referred to as cerebrotic blots.

While every cerebrotic blot manifests differently, there are features that every fully manifested blot have in common. For instance, on the periphery of a blot, only a slight influence is felt. However, as one moves ever closer to the blot's core, the corrupt nature of the landscape and the creatures that inhabit it become more and more obvious. In this central zone of the cerebrotic blot, called the marrow, the landscape is twisted, and the flora and fauna are dramatically altered. Strange new creatures, born of equal parts nature and madness, fester and hunt in this perverted place. If one could travel so far, one would find that pure madness holds sway at the marrow's core, where a tiny puncture provides intermittent contact to the Far Realm itself.

Thus, a cerebrotic blot has two main zones: the periphery, and the marrow. The core is but a doorway.

Cerebrotic Periphery

The periphery of a blot is not outwardly different than the environment that is normal for the area, nor is it visible: It is merely an alien influence. However, a subtle influence pervades the area, overlaying the area with an unnerving sense of dread and foisting nightmares upon those unlucky enough to rest within or near the periphery. Over time, the land inside a periphery will begin to take on strange traits and odd geometry. This boundary can be noticed with a successful DC 20 Spot check.

Dimensions: The periphery of a blot is not necessarily a symmetrical circle encompassing a smaller marrow—indeed, it is more likely that a cerebrotic blot's periphery occurs in blotches, river-like swathes, and discontinuous pockets of influence. A typical periphery can unevenly pervade an area several miles in circumference. Note that a cerebrotic periphery can lie completely above ground, completely below ground, or some combination of both. Despite its uneven occurrence, the periphery of a cerebrotic blot frequently encompasses the entirety of the inner marrow, where things are different. The boundaries of a cerebrotic periphery sometimes rapidly expand

THE FAR REALM IN EBERRON

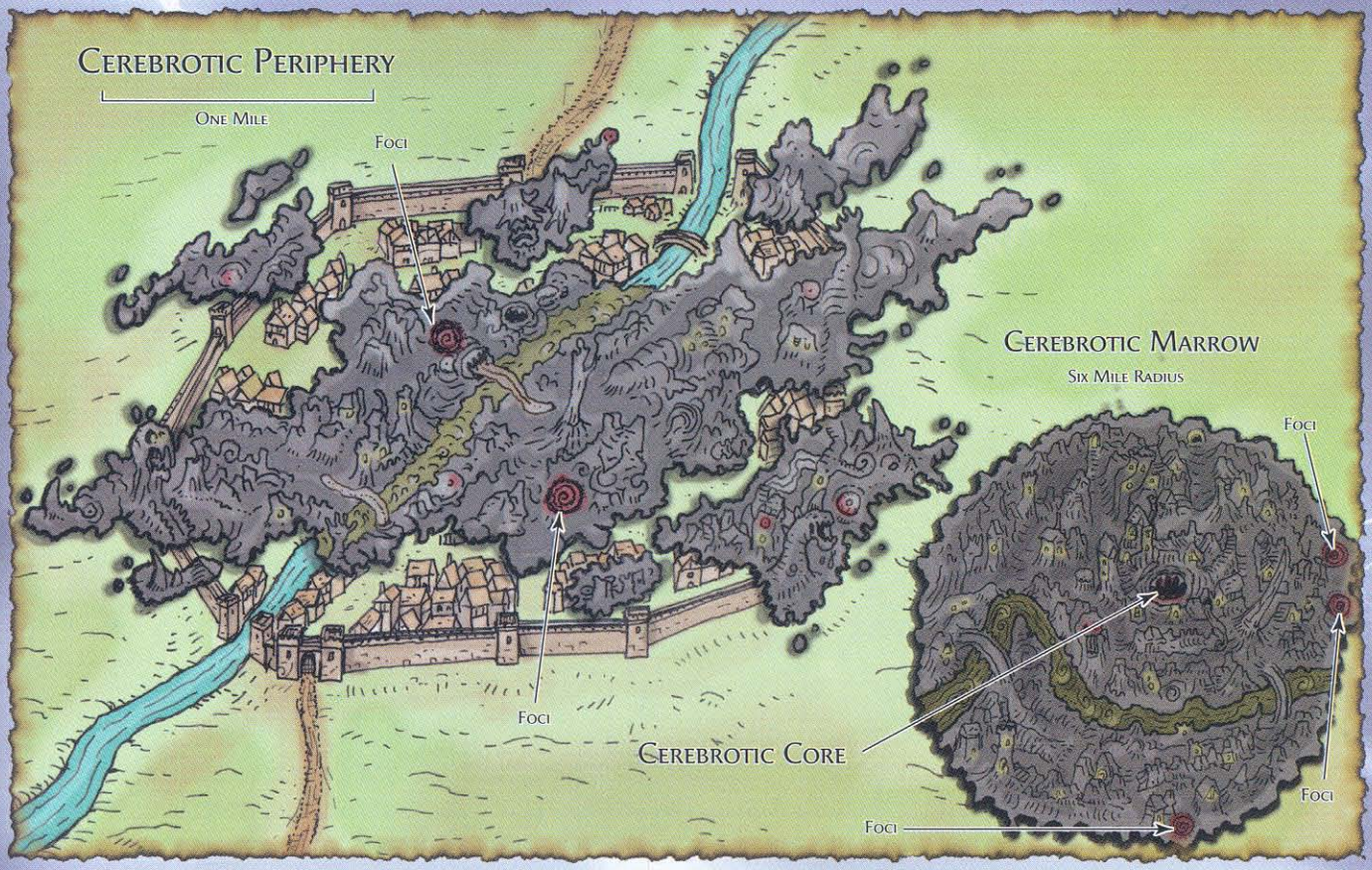
The material in this article can be used in whole or in part with Eberron's conception of Xoriat, except for the section titled Far Realm History—the history described here is for a campaign world other than Eberron, where the Far Realm made itself known through means other than those experienced by the Five Nations.

The Far Realm has many names, and the manner in which it manifests on any given plane or world varies. Even locations in Eberron might be touched by the occasional cerebrotic blot and be influenced as described herein. Thus does the Far Realm contain far more than just daelkyr.

MAGNITUDE OF THE BLOT

Because a fully manifested cerebrotic blot has two different regions of intensity (periphery and marrow), the DM must decide to what extent a blot touches the world. For instance, one DM might decide to use just a partially manifested cerebrotic blot that only alters the landscape like a blot's periphery. Another DM might decide that a blot is fully formed, planning his campaign such that it initially only grazes the periphery of the blot.

Beyond simple death and madness, cerebrotic blots offer creatures a chance to siphon power from the blot's core, where a sphincter, no matter how small, leaks illworldly strangeness into the realm of time and space. Siphoning such power is a dangerous art referred to as cerebrosis. See the following Cerebrosis section for more on the powerful magic birthed of the Far Realm's insanity.



or unaccountably retreat according to unknowable tides.

Foci: Despite a periphery's discontinuous nature, each periphery always possesses one or more foci. A periphery focus serves to anchor the periphery, and more importantly it serves as the method whereby one passes between the periphery and the marrow. Despite normal laws of nature that suggest that merely walking inward on any path from the periphery would allow a traveler to penetrate deeper portions of the cerebrotic blot, the reality-rupturing influence of the Far Realm actually helps to protect the real world by restricting physical access to the marrow through only a few choke points.

A typical focus of a cerebrotic periphery takes the form of a slab of stone, sometimes a pillarlike rocky outcropping, other times an altarlike slab, and sometimes even a free-standing arch of stone. A strange, phosphorescent growth is visible upon the stone, and any creature that touches this growth (or smears it upon their forehead, as pilgrims are wont to do) can pass from the periphery to the marrow by walking past (or through) the focus, and back again via the same route. To the traveler it seems that his path inward is continuous, while to an observer the walking traveler appears to fade into translucence and then into nothingness.

Environmental Effects of the Periphery: A field of corruption pervades each cerebrotic periphery. The field is invisible to the naked eye as well as magical or psionic perception. However, the temperature is always several degrees lower than surrounding conditions warrant. Additionally, characters who succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom check feel an indefinable aura of "wrongness" while within the boundary.

Dream Corruption: Creatures within a cerebrotic blot's periphery have cause to fear their nightmares. The sleeper is plagued with the same awful dream whenever sleep claims him.

In the dream, the dreamer finds himself in an unformed, gelatinous body upon a field of the recently slain, or perhaps a plague-ridden street. The dreamer finds that he is ravenously hungry and is unable to stop himself from partaking of the bountiful feast lying unguarded upon the road. The dreamer uses his newfound body to directly digest "food" in a horribly external fashion. Sane beings must make a DC 14 Will save, or take 1 point of Wisdom damage. Creatures who reach 0 Wisdom through the dream corruption effect are considered permanently insane and put under the control of the DM forevermore. This Wisdom damage cannot be healed naturally while the subject remains in the periphery. This effect manifests whenever any intelligent creature sleeps within the area.

Periphery Encounters: Roll on the Periphery Encounter Table when characters visit a focus for the first time or for the first time in over a week. The creatures encountered are maddened—touch by some strange feral killing impulse—beyond even that which is normal for the creature indicated.

PERIPHERY ENCOUNTER TABLE (AVERAGE EL 8)

d%	Encounter
01–10	1 ochre jelly
11–50	4 carrion crawlers
51–75	2 shambling mounds
76–97	1 mind flayer
98–100	Roll on the Marrow Encounter table

Cerebrotic Marrow

Once a creature uses the focus to cross between the periphery and the marrow, the hidden awfulness of the inner region of the blot soon becomes apparent. The sky above shifts and melts, constantly raining thick amoebic liquid that, upon alighting on solid surfaces, seeps and collects in putrescent pools, sometimes even spontaneously forming amoebic crawlers (see Far Realm Monstrosities). Most often, the terrible rain simply renders non-natives off-balance and vulnerable. Regardless of where it collects, the constant fall of the amoebic drizzle reduces vision of distant landscape features into nightmarish, blurred enigmas (see Environmental Effects within the Marrow). The visible landscape is scarred by frequent earth movements, as if the world itself seeks to shake off the corruption of the blot.

Creatures of nightmare inhabit the marrow—some mutated versions of what once lived in the area before the coming of the blot, others wholly new species that managed to squeeze through from the Far Realm itself. Such creatures include amoebic crawlers, cranial encysters, kaortic hulks, and nightseeds.

Within the hidden marrows of cerebrotic blots that have persisted for several years or more, awful assemblies of what can only be called cities sometimes tower over the landscape. The slender towers of these metropoli, wavering and reaching miles into the air like blind worms, threaten to nauseate creatures from the natural world who even try to imagine such a sight. What awful designs are plotted within these structures none have ever returned to report—they are best given a wide berth by interlopers in the marrow seeking to stand at the inmost chasm.

Dimensions: The cerebrotic marrow is "out of phase" with the surrounding landscape and in a sense steals away the lands upon which it originally spilled, hiding them behind a veil of ruptured reality. Thus the marrow can be, and often is, larger on the inside than the exterior periphery would suggest. The typical cerebrotic marrow is a spherical volume encompassing almost 20 square miles of space. At the center lies the marrow's core, a pitlike void that provides a direct channel of influence between the Far Realm and reality, and sometimes, a discrete connection. At the exterior of the marrow one or more access points to the periphery called foci can be found.

Foci: The foci that connect the cerebrotic marrow to the periphery are the very same foci that allow travel from the periphery to the marrow. Leaving the marrow requires the traveler to access the foci as described under Cerebrotic Periphery.

Core: In truth, the connection to the Far Realm at the marrow's core could also be called a foci. Under normal circumstances, the core focus appears to be a steep-walled, slime-sheathed pit leading into an absolute void. A smell of stagnation and humidity is ushered upward in a wet wind that blows ever up and out. This is the most common physical manifestation of the perverting Far Realm's influence as it reaches into the world.

Sometimes the core opens, allowing direct access to the Far Realm (and vice versa). Certain spells produce this effect in an attempt to generate specific results, but it is dangerous (see Cerebrosis).

Environmental Effects Within the Marrow: Besides the occasional tremor that occurs roughly once per day (DC 13 Balance check to avoid falling prone), the constant amoebic rain is the most significant and annoying environmental effect within the marrow. All visibility ranges are halved while in the amoebic rain, but worse, all creatures (except those native to the Far Realm and the marrow) subject to the drizzle suffer a –1 penalty on their attack rolls, saving throws, ability checks, and skill checks due to the annoying, distracting nature of the viscous, gooey fluid that flows and collects almost as if it had a mind of its own.

OTHER DENIZENS OF THE MARROW

Creatures of the Far Realm, some new and some updated to the new editions, have shown up in many D&D products since their initial appearance in *The Gates of Firestorm Peak*. If you have access to any of these books, the creatures described below are perfect candidates to flesh out a cerebrotic blot or other Far Realm-themed adventures you put together.

Dharculus: *The Gates of Firestorm Peak, Planar Handbook*
Gibbering Mouther: *Lords of Madness, Monster Manual*
Half-Farspawn: *Lords of Madness*
Kaorti: *Fiend Folio*
Mooncalf: *Heart of Nightfang Spire, Monster Manual II*
Neh-Thalggu: *Epic Level Handbook*
Odopi: *Monster Manual III*
Pseudonatural creature: *Complete Arcane, Epic Level Handbook, Tome & Blood*
Rukanyr: *Fiend Folio*
Rukarazyll: *Monster Manual II*
Shaboath: *Lords of Madness*
Shrieking Terror: *Monster Manual III*
Skybleeder: *Fiend Folio*
Uvuudaum: *Epic Level Handbook*
Voidmind creature: *Monster Manual III*
Wyste: *The Gates of Firestorm Peak, Monster Manual II, The Speaker in Dreams*



Mood Corruption: Creatures in this zone of influence are easily aggravated. Tempers flare, and an argument can quickly get out of control. Each time a group has an argument or even a simple disagreement, involved members must succeed at a DC 14 Will save or feel a sudden burning desire to end the disagreement in a decisive manner by attacking those with whom they disagree. The affected creature strikes out at its erstwhile companions with murderous intent for 1d4+1 rounds, after which the urge passes. Once a particular creature is affected (or makes its saving throw to avoid being affected), it is immune to the effects of mood corruption for one day.

Form Corruption: Every time a creature receives magical healing in the marrow, influence from the core threatens to corrupt the healed flesh. Each hit point healed per spell is equal to the percent chance that the creature's form becomes corrupted. For instance, if a creature is healed for 12 points of damage, it stands a 12% chance of having its healed flesh corrupted.

If a creature is affected, it is not only healed, but is the recipient of a strange new vestigial addition to its body at the point where the wound was healed. The vestigial organ or limb is entirely useless. A corruption can be removed "surgically," but doing so deals 3d10 points of damage to the amputee. A vestigial limb might take the form of one of the following corruptions:

d10	Corruption to the Flesh
1	Blinking eye
2	Flapping tongue
3	Grasping hand
4	Mucus-oozing sore
5	Muttering mouth
6	Screaming hair
7	Sinuous tentacle
8	Teethy scales
9	Wagging tail
10	Waggling finger

Marrow Encounters: Roll on the Marrow Encounter Table once every 8 hours the characters spend in the marrow.

MARROW ENCOUNTER TABLE

d%	Encounter
01–24	No encounter
25–39	4 amoebic crawlers
40–54	4 cranial encysters
55–69	1 gibbering mouther
70–84	1 kaortic hulk
85–94	1 creature from the Other Denizens of the Marrow sidebar
95–100	1 nightseed

Cerebrotic Core

A slime-lined pit pulses and heaves like a living orifice, eager to consume. To hurl oneself into the pit is sometimes sufficient to briefly open the portal that opens directly upon the Far Realm. The traveler falls directly into the fabled Amoebic Sea, there to slowly

CEREBROSIS [GENERAL]

You have discovered the secret of manipulating and creating interfaces between the sane world and the Far Realm.

Prerequisite: Spellcaster level 1st, must undergo the Rite of the Blot.

Benefit: You are now referred to as a cerebrant, and you learn a constellation of new cerebrotic spells (see Cerebrotic Spell List). If you are a caster who prepares spells, you can pen each of these spells into your spellbook when you are high enough level to do so as additional bonus spells known. Whether you cast spells spontaneously or prepare spells, you can't cast any cerebrotic spells you know if you are not high enough level to cast them normally.

In addition to being able to learn cerebrotic spells, you gain a +2 bonus on your saving throws versus any effect generated by a creature of the Far Realm or by any cerebrosis spell. You don't gain this bonus when making saving throws required by any cerebrotic spell you attempt to escalate (as described in each spell description).

Special: Upon taking this feat, you become plagued with persistent, awful dreams that you can't recall with perfect clarity but which leave you drawn and pale with sleeplessness. Sometimes you remember snippets of the dream but then shudder and push them out of your mind. Your nightmare-riddled sleep undermines your Constitution score, saddling you with a permanent –1 penalty.

FAR LOOK [GENERAL]

You have looked deep into the Far Realm, and power has answered... but at what cost?

Prerequisite: Spellcaster level 1st, Cerebrosis, must undergo the Rite of the Blot.

Benefit: You gain one extra spell slot in your daily allotment that you can use to cast any cerebrosis-granted spell you know. This extra slot can be at any level up to the highest-level spell you can cast. If you prepare your spells, you must decide at the time of preparation for the day what level and what spell you'd like for that day. If you cast your spells like a sorcerer, you have an extra "floating" slot that can be used at any time at any level with a cerebrosis spell you know.

The strain this ability demands upon your merely fleshy brain incurs a –2 penalty to your Wisdom score.

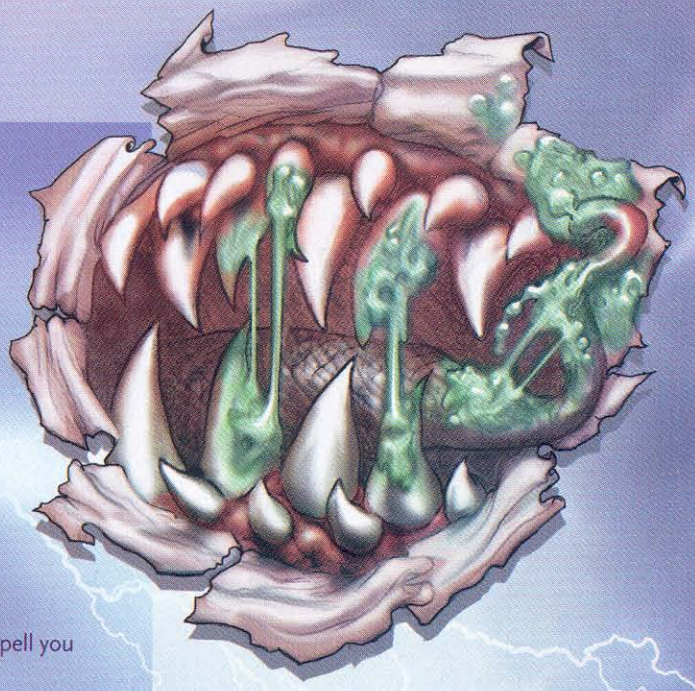
Special: You can gain this feat multiple times. Each time you take it you gain an extra spell slot at any level that can be used to cast a cerebrosis-granted spell and you suffer an additional –2 penalty to your Wisdom score. If at any time you suffer so much Wisdom damage that your Wisdom score goes to 0, the strain on your mind breaks wide and you are subject to the effects of a *finger of expulsion* spell as if cast on yourself by yourself (you gain a saving throw, but modified by your newly reduced Wisdom score).

be digested into the obscene geometry, mind shattered and wafting away like vapor, food for Far Realm predators. For unprotected travelers from rational planes of existence, a trip to the Far Realm is one way.

Cerebrosis

Study too long the limitless abysses of inexplicably colored twilight and bafflingly disordered sound that holds sway beyond the dimensions of the sane and one might eventually come down with a brain fever. The study of cerbrosis is birthed of such a fever.

Beyond simple death and madness, cerebrosis allows the mentally hardy (or already crazed) a chance to siphon power from "other-where," abysses crowded with indescribably angled masses of alien-hued substance and unknowable intent.



The appearance of a cerebrotic blot in a nearby locale can lead inquisitive creatures to the art of cerebrosis. The blot, reaching as it does into a realm so incomprehensibly far from our own that the entities there might not abide by the laws of reality as we understand them, can also be the source of great power.

Rite of the Blot: To learn cerebrosis, the supplicant must undergo the Rite of the Blot. Of course, one must first discover that such a thing as cerebrosis exists. To this end the supplicant must first succeed at a DC 25 Knowledge (arcana) check and then research what steps one must take to undergo the Rite of the Blot, calling for an additional DC 28 Knowledge (arcana) check. If either of these checks fail, the supplicant must first gain another rank in Knowledge (arcane) before trying again.

At its most basic, the supplicant must visit a cerebrotic blot, passing through each of the foci in turn, until she comes finally to the core. Upon reaching the edge of the cerebrotic core, the supplicant must spend one day in contemplation, looking into the darkness until shapes beyond description begin to appear. In conjunction with this task the supplicant must expend 400 gp on the necessary incense and herbs needed to maintain the visions. Upon completion, the supplicant gains Cerebrosis as a bonus feat.

If the character is nowhere near a cerebrotic blot or does not wish to

brave such a potentially dangerous journey, she can instead undergo a week-long ritual of meditation on the nature of the Far Realm (during which awful visions present themselves featuring black-clad cultists, their features shadowed within voluminous hoods, having toppled glare-eyed and drool-speckled into the clutch of mad gods). In conjunction with this task the supplicant must expend 1,400 gp on the necessary incense and herbs needed to bring about the visions. Upon completion, the supplicant gains Cerebrosis as a bonus feat.

Characters who undergo the Rite of the Blot and gain the Cerebrosis feat can be referred to as cerebrants.

Cerebrotic Spells

These twisted spells can only be learned and cast by those with the Cerebrosis feat. In addition to their normal effect, these spells can be escalated, pushed beyond the regular limits imposed by common sense. This escalation always comes at some risk to the caster, as noted in the spell's description.

Aching Dread

Necromancy [Fear, Mind-Affecting]
Level: Cerebrant 1
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: 10 ft.
Targets: All enemies in a 10-ft. radius burst centered on you.
Duration: 1 round/level
Saving Throw: Will negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

Your mere presence alters the psychological landscape of the surrounding aether, injecting it with unseen phantasms and suggestions of danger born of cyclopean vistas. All creatures within the area are stricken with a feeling of horrible dread that causes them to become shaken for the duration.

Cerebrotic Escalation: Instead of merely attempting to shake your foes, on a failed save they are frightened (for 1 round/level). However, if you attempt this escalation, you must succeed on a DC 13 Will save. On a failed save, the spell fails and is lost, and instead you are frightened for 1 minute.

Call Amoebic Crawler

Conjuration (Summoning)
Level: Cerebrant 2
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 round
Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Effect: One summoned amoebic crawler
Duration: 1 round/level (D)
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

This spell calls an extraplanar creature known as an amoebic crawler. It appears where you designate and acts immediately, on your turn. It attacks your opponents to the best of its ability. If you can communicate with the creature, you can direct it not to attack, to attack particular enemies, or to perform other actions.

Cerebrotic Escalation: Instead of merely calling one amoebic crawler, you can call two. However, if you do so you must make a DC 13 Will saving throw, or the extra creature turns on you.

Call Cranial Encyster

Conjuration (Summoning)
Level: Cerebrant 4
Effect: 1d3+1 summoned cranial encysters

As *call amoebic crawler*, except this spell summons 1d3+1 extraplanar creatures known as cranial encysters.

Cerebrotic Escalation: Instead of randomly determining how many cranial encysters respond to your call (1d3+1), you can automatically call five to do your bidding. However, if you do so you must make a DC 16 Will save, or two of the extra encysters turn on you.

CEREBROTIC SPELLS

1st-Level Cerebrotic Spells
Aching Dread: Foes nearby your terrible presence become shaken.

2nd-Level Cerebrotic Spells
Call Amoebic Crawler: Far Realm creature comes to your call.

3rd-Level Cerebrotic Spells
Far Realm Visitation: Sic partially summoned horror on foe.
Dimension Rift: Smash spatial geometry to enable travel.

4th-Level Cerebrotic Spells
Call Cranial Encyster: Far Realm creature comes to your call.
Lingering Raver: Partially summoned horror kills up to two foes.

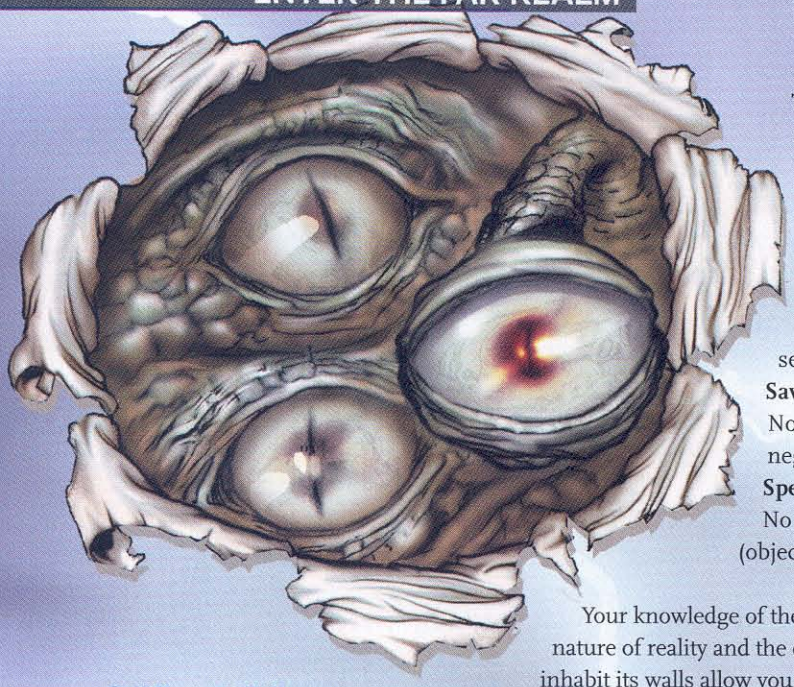
5th-Level Cerebrotic Spells
Soul-blasting Dread: Foes in 20-ft. radius become panicked.

6th-Level Cerebrotic Spells
Call Kaortic Hulk: Far Realm creature comes to your call.

7th-Level Cerebrotic Spells
Finger of Expulsion: Shatter spatial geometry to send foe into Far Realm.

8th-Level Cerebrotic Spells
Call Nightseed: Far Realm creature comes to your call.

9th-Level Cerebrotic Spells
Welcome the Amoebic Sea: Summon an aspect of Far Realm into real world.



Call Kaortic Hulk

Conjuration (Summoning)
Level: Cerebrant 6
Effect: One summoned kaortic hulk

As *call amoebic crawler*, except this spell summons an extraplanar creature known as a kaortic hulk.

Cerebrotic Escalation: Instead of merely calling one kaortic hulk, you can call two. However, if you do so you must make a DC 19 Will save, or the extra creature turns on you.

Call Nightseed

Conjuration (Summoning)
Level: Cerebrant 8
Effect: One summoned nightseed

As *call amoebic crawler*, except this spell summons an extraplanar creature known as a nightseed.

Cerebrotic Escalation: Instead of merely calling one nightseed, you can call two. However, if you do so you must make a DC 22 Will save, or the extra creature turns on you.

Dimension Rift

Conjuration (Teleportation)
Level: Cerebrant 3
Components: V
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Long (400 ft. + 40 ft./level); see text
Target: You and touched objects or other touched willing creatures
Duration: Variable; see text
Saving Throw: None and Will negates (object)
Spell Resistance: No and Yes (object)

Your knowledge of the fragile nature of reality and the entities that inhabit its walls allow you to attempt to take short cuts through space, albeit dangerous ones.

You transfer yourself from your current location to any other spot within range. You usually arrive at exactly the spot desired—whether by simply visualizing the area or by stating direction, such as "500 feet straight downward," or "upward to the northwest, 45-degree angle, 800 feet."

However, the passage between your initial location and the new location is not instantaneous; it takes one full round, and sometimes longer! Furthermore, while you slide outside of the regular geometry of space, awful creatures that inhabit those interstices sometimes take an unhealthy interest in you. Consult the following table. Damage taken indicates unaccountable claw marks, scratches, and bites.

In addition to being dangerous, the trip is mentally tortuous. The traveler feels that he moves under his own power, but he does not climb, fly, run, or wriggle. Instead, the traveler feels his body and mind transmuted and projected through a howling, organic, somehow horribly alive medium. Thankfully, the trip is too brief (usually...) to mentally scar the traveler.

After using this spell, you can't take any other actions until your next turn. You can bring along objects as long as their weight doesn't exceed your maximum load. You may also bring one additional willing Medium or smaller creature (carrying gear or objects up to its maximum load) or its equivalent per three caster levels. A Large creature counts as two Medium creatures, a Huge creature counts as four Medium creatures, and so forth. All creatures to be transported must be in contact with one another, and at least one of those creatures must be in contact with you. All creatures and objects with you share your transit time and damage, if any. If the destination space is occupied, the caster appears in the closest unoccupied space. Determine the closest space randomly if necessary.

d100	Transit Time	Damage
01–25	1 round	None
26–65	2 rounds	None
66–80	2 rounds	1d6 points
81–85	3 rounds	2d6 points
86–90	4 rounds	3d6 points
91–95	5 rounds	4d6 points
96–99	6 rounds	5d6 points
00+	Never*	?

*Later scrutiny of the area where the caster was to have appeared, if in an out of the way place little traveled or undisturbed, sometimes reveals fragments of bone and the last rotted remains of the caster, dead for centuries.

Cerebrotic Escalation: Instead of merely choosing to travel a set distance you can attempt to leap far outside of the regular geometry of your plane and appear up to 500 miles away. However, you must have physically visited the location yourself prior to dimension shifting into it. More worrisome is the modifier you must make on the d100 roll to determine your transit time—when using this special use of *dimension rift*, you add a +30 modifier on the d100 roll. Moving so much farther in spaces not meant for physical beings of this cosmology is all the more dangerous.

Far Realm Visitation

Necromancy [Fear, Mind-Affecting]
Level: Cerebrant 3
Components: V, S



Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Target: One living creature
Duration: 1d4+1 rounds; see text
Saving Throw: Will partial; see text
Spell Resistance: Yes

You extract lurking horror from the wavering interstice that protects sane reality from the Far Realm and thrust it at your target: a nightmare of eyes, tentacles, dripping slime, and gnashing mouths all screaming atonally. You and others see only a vague shape as it lurches and envelopes the target, dealing 3d6 points of nonlethal damage as the target's flesh is disrupted with the contact (no saving throw is allowed for this effect). If the target fails his Will save, his horror of the fearsome visitor dazes him for 1d4+1 rounds, but even while dazed the target continues to scream, cry, and froth.

Cerebrotic Escalation: You can attempt to make the visitation all the more terrible by pulling it more fully into the sane world, increasing the DC of the subject's saving throw by +2. However, if you attempt this escalation, you must succeed on a DC 16 Will save. On a failed save, you are subject to the visitor's attention.

Finger of Expulsion

Conjuration (Teleportation)
Level: Cerebrant 7
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Target: One creature
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: Will partial
Spell Resistance: Yes

With a gesture that roughly traces the silhouette of your intended target, you attempt to push the target out of reality and into the ravenous belly of the Far Realm. For most creatures, this means death, as they are digested into their new environment (either quickly and violently, or slowly and painfully). The target is entitled to a Will save to resist being drawn down the temporary wormhole. If the save is successful, the creature instead takes 5d6 points of damage from the temporary contact with the abhorrent reality through the portal. If the target is sucked through, it is not a clean expulsion and sufficient residue of the victim remains behind to serve as the foundation of *resurrection* spell.

Cerebrotic Escalation: You can attempt to push up to two creatures into the Far Realm. Both targets must be in range of the spell and not more than 30 feet apart. However, if you attempt this escalation, you must succeed on a DC 20 Will saving throw. On a failed save, neither target is affected and you are pushed into the Far Realm.

Lingering Raver

Necromancy [Fear, Mind-Affecting]
Level: Cerebrant 4
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Target: One living creature per round; see text
Duration: 2 rounds; see text

Saving Throw: Will save, then Fortitude partial; see text
Spell Resistance: Yes

You extract a mote of thought from the Far Realm and thrust it at your target. This mote of lunatic thought takes the form of an alien eye bulging forth from an orb of slime-covered tentacles. You and others (initially) see only a vague shape as it lurches for the target.

The target first gets a Will save to clamp down on his hysterical fear as the raver touches the subject, transferring its insanity. If his fear remains uncontrolled, the subject must succeed on a Fortitude save or die from fear. Even if the Fortitude save is successful, the subject takes 3d6 points of damage as its flesh is warped and distorted by the insanity of the Far Realm.

Even if the subject succeeds on one or both saves, the raver persists as a shadow of nameless dread. On the subsequent round it attacks one creature, randomly selected, that is within 30 feet of the initial subject. The new target is attacked in the same manner as the initial subject was attacked. Even the caster and his allies are potential targets. If the caster is attacked, however, he enjoys a +2 bonus on his saving throw to master his fear (in addition to the +2 bonus on his saving throws for possessing the Cerebrosis feat).

After the second round's attack, the raver seeps back into formless obscurity.

Cerebrotic Escalation: You can attempt to make the raver all the more terrible by pulling it more fully into the sane world, causing it to remain for a third round. On this third round, the raver attacks a third target, ignoring the first two unless they are the only targets within range. However, if you attempt this escalation, you must succeed on a DC 17 Will save. On a failed save, you are the subject of the raver's initial attention.

Soul Blasting Dread

Necromancy [Fear, Mind-Affecting]
Level: Cerebrant 5
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 1 full round
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Area: 20-ft.-radius burst
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: Will negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

There are things sane creatures are not meant to experience. You thus feel confident that when you summon into being the awful likeness of the Amoebic Sea, which is part and parcel of the Far Realm, creatures within the area will struggle free from the grasp of their lucidity.

Creatures in the area where the likeness of the Amoebic Sea briefly manifests (treat as a burst) become panicked for 1 round per caster level.

Material Component: A dram of powdered mucus or other residue or excretion gathered from a Far Realm creature.

Cerebrotic Escalation: You can attempt to make the dread all the more terrible by manifesting the essence of the Amoebic Sea more fully into the sane world, causing those targets who fail their save to also take 1d4 points of Wisdom damage. However, if you attempt this escalation, you must succeed on a DC 19 Will save. On a failed save, the spell fails and is lost, and instead you are panicked for 1 minute.

Welcome the Amoebic Sea

Conjuration (Summoning)
Level: Cerebrant 9
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 1 full round
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Area: 10-ft.-radius spread
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: Fortitude partial; Will negates secondary spread; see text
Spell Resistance: Yes

You briefly summon a polyp of the Amoebic Sea into the world. Creatures within the 20-foot-diameter area where the Amoebic Sea flashes into existence are subject to a medium that is instantly destructive to their flesh and minds.

Creatures within the area are subject to a sticky, twilight abyss filled with the sound of a monstrous half-acoustic pulsing and the thin monotonous piping of an unseen flute. More importantly, any creature within the area takes 20d6 points of damage. Any creature reduced to 0 or fewer hit points is completely digested, leaving behind only red-tinged bubbles. A digested creature's equipment is unaffected, and remains when the aspect of the Amoebic Sea flashes away. A creature that fails its save and survives is panicked for 1 minute.

A creature that makes a successful Fortitude save is partially affected, taking only 5d6 points of damage and becoming automatically panicked for 1 round following the departure of the Amoebic Sea. If the damage reduces the creature to 0 or fewer hit points, it is still entirely digested.

Material Component: A vial containing the digested fluid remains of a sentient creature.

Cerebrotic Escalation: You can attempt to double the radius of effect to a 20-foot-radius spread. However, if you attempt this escalation, you must succeed on a DC 23 Will save. On a failed save, the polyp of the Amoebic Sea still appears in a 20-foot-radius, but this radius is instead centered on you.

Far Realm Monstrosities

Anywhere the Far Realm has touched the world, warped and terrifying creatures are also found.

Amoebic Crawler

Large Ooze (Extraplanar)
Hit Dice: 4d10+32 (54 hp)
Initiative: +0
Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares)
Armor Class: 9 (–1 size), touch 9, flat-footed 9
Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+7
Attack: Tentacle +2 melee (1d6 plus 1d6 acid)
Full Attack: 2 tentacles +2 melee (1d6 plus 1d6 acid)
Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.
Special Attacks: Acid, improved grab, vile touch
Special Qualities: Blindsight 60 ft., immunity to electricity, ooze traits, translucent
Saves: Fort +9, Ref +1, Will –4

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 11, Con 26, Int —, Wis 1, Cha 11
Skills: —
Feats: —
Environment: Any
Organization: Solitary
Challenge Rating: 3
Treasure: Standard
Alignment: Always neutral
Advancement: 5–12 HD (Large); 13–24 HD (Huge)
Level Adjustment: —

A wriggling shape pulses forward, at least 10 feet in length. It is a nauseatingly textured translucent worm whose head gradually narrows into two ominously long, questing tentacles.

Condensed from the hidden marrow of a cerebrotic blot, amoebic crawlers are clots of alien space-time concentrated into awful ravenous, self-propelled motes. Amoebic crawlers partake somewhat of the realm which is ultimately responsible for their existence, and thus exude a palpable dread.

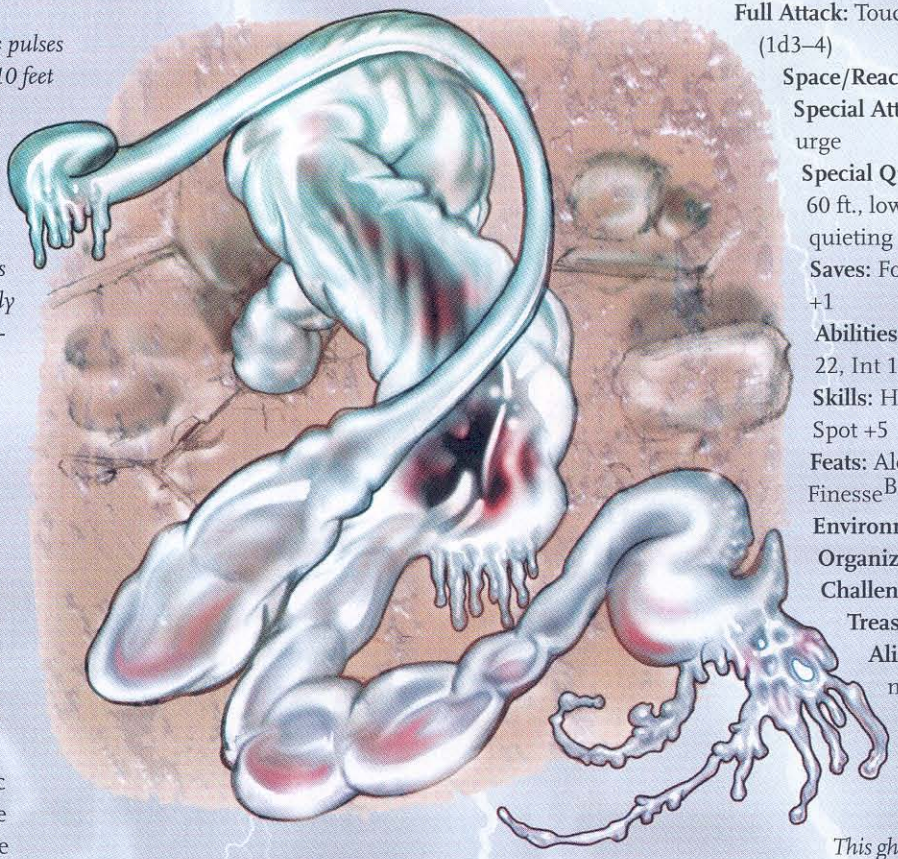
An amoebic crawler is 10 feet long, although its tentacles can stretch further. It weighs about 1,000 pounds, although much larger specimens are known to exist.

Combat

An amoebic crawler attacks with its lashing tentacles, attempting to grab and slowly strangle helpless foes. Subdued foes are absorbed into the crawler's body in an horrific external digestive process.

Acid (Ex): An amoebic crawler's acid does not harm metal or stone.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, an amoebic crawler must hit with its tentacle attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and deals damage automatically every round (those grappled are affected by its vile touch ability).



Vile Touch (Su): Those grappled by the slimy tentacles of this creature sometimes glimpse images from the Far Realm, and the sight sends them into screaming, explosive convulsions of nausea. Each round a creature remains grappled, it must succeed on a DC 12 Will save or be nauseated for that round.

Translucent (Ex): Amoebic crawlers are hard to see, even under ideal conditions, and it takes a DC 10 Spot check to notice one. Creatures who fail to notice a crawler and walk into it automatically take acid damage.

Cranial Encyster

Tiny Magical Beast (Psionic, Extraplanar)
Hit Dice: 1d10+6 (11 hp)
Initiative: +7
Speed: 40 ft. (8 squares)
Armor Class: 22 (+2 size, +3 natural, +7 Dex), touch 19, flat-footed 15
Base Attack/Grapple: +1/–11 (+1 when attached)
Attack: Touch +10 melee (1d3–4)
Full Attack: Touch +10 melee (1d3–4)
Space/Reach: 2-1/2 ft./0 ft.
Special Attacks: Attach, death urge
Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, disquieting
Saves: Fort +8, Ref +9, Will +1
Abilities: Str 3, Dex 24, Con 22, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 16
Skills: Hide +15, Listen +5, Spot +5
Feats: Alertness, Weapon Finesse[B]
Environment: Any
Organization: Urge (2–4)
Challenge Rating: 3
Treasure: None
Alignment: Always neutral evil
Advancement: —
Level Adjustment: —

This ghastly creature crosses a humanoid face with an obscenely bloated tick, with legs each tapering to needle points. From the creature's back, the face howls, screams, grunts, and gibbers its eager hunger.

Cranial encysters are creatures born of too-close contact with the Far Realm's influence. Encysters feed on the essence of dying creatures, and to that end they attempt to coerce victims to lethally injure themselves via direct contact. Even a single cranial encyster is a formidable threat.

A cranial encyster has the color of pinkish, almost translucent flesh. Its

rolling eyes are bone white, while its teeth are the color of corruption and its tongue diseased and yellowed.

A cranial encyster is about the size of a deflated human head with legs. It weighs about 1 pound.

Combat

A cranial encyster attacks by charging up to a victim, migrating to the victim's head, and plunging its needle-tipped legs into the victim's skull. This is a touch attack and can target only Small or larger creatures that have a discernable head or skull.

Disquieting (Ex): All creatures (other than cranial encysters) within 30 feet who hear the gibbering must make a DC 13 Will save or be shaken for that encounter. If the face on the back of the encyster is that of a friend or loved one, the save DC increases to 18. Once a creature attempts a saving throw, whether it succeeds or not, it cannot be disquieted by an encyster again for one day.

Attach (Ex): If a cranial encyster hits with a touch attack, it automatically scrabbles onto the victim's head and inserts its needle-tipped legs directly into the victim's skull. An attached cranial encyster is effectively grappling its prey. The encyster loses its Dexterity bonus to AC and has an AC of 15, but holds on with great tenacity. Encysters have a +12 racial bonus on grapple checks (already figured into the Base Attack/Grapple entry above).

An attached encyster can be struck with a weapon or grappled itself. To remove an attached encyster through grappling, the opponent must achieve a pin against the creature.

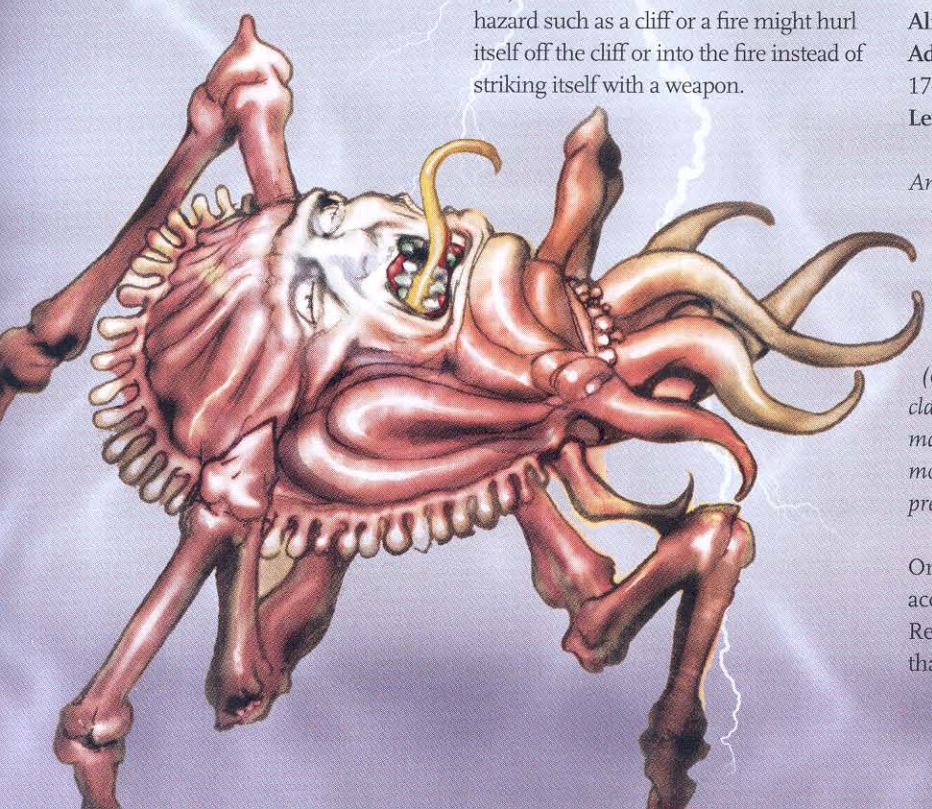
Death Urge (Sp): Once successfully attached, the awful needle-tipped limbs already inserted into the victim's skull implant a death-urge impulse in the subject's unconscious if the victim fails a DC 16 Will save. Each round a cranial encyster remains attached, the victim must succeed on a new save or gain the death impulse. On the subject's next turn after being encysted with a death impulse, the subject looks for the quickest method to end its life and attempts to do so. The subject takes no other action on its turn except attempting to harm itself.

If armed, the subject attacks itself as a full-round action. The attack automatically succeeds and deals damage as a critical hit. If unarmed, the subject moves adjacent to the nearest enemy and provokes an attack of opportunity by offering its opponent an opening (which the opponent may or may not choose to take advantage of).

If the subject is unarmed and no enemy is nearby, the subject simply does nothing at all. At the Dungeon Master's option, a subject close to an immediate and lethal hazard such as a cliff or a fire might hurl itself off the cliff or into the fire instead of striking itself with a weapon.

An implanted death urge lasts for 1d4 rounds.

If an encyster is removed, the death urge is also immediately lifted. If a creature is reduced to fewer than 0 hit points or dies, the encyster disengages, looking for a new target. Its facelike effigy is now that of the just-slain victim.



Kaortic Hulk

Huge Magical Beast (Extraplanar)
Hit Dice: 9d10+45 (94 hp)
Initiative: +2
Speed: 40 ft. (8 squares)
Armor Class: 27 (–2 size, +2 Dex, +17 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 25
Base Attack/Grapple: +9/+25
Attack: Bite +16 melee (2d8+8)
Full Attack: Bite +16 melee (2d8+8) and 2 claws +10 melee (2d6+4)
Space/Reach: 15 ft./10 ft.
Special Attacks: Spell-like abilities
Special Qualities: Blindsight 120 ft., reluctant servant
Saves: Fort +11, Ref +10, Will +6
Abilities: Str 27, Dex 15, Con 20, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 6
Skills: Jump +18, Listen +9, Spot +3
Feats: Alertness, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Focus (bite)
Environment: Any
Organization: Solitary
Challenge Rating: 8
Treasure: None
Alignment: Always neutral evil
Advancement: 10–16 HD (Huge); 17–27 HD (Gargantuan)
Level Adjustment: —

An armored, horrible bulk, this creature is a mass of resinous armor, organically ribbed and fluted, giving the creature a slick and disturbingly obscene character. Its overall shape, while huge, is like a predatory beast, quadrupedal (each armored limb tipped with terrible claws), and complete with a tooth-filled maw. Eyeless and earless, this creature moves as if it some how knows when its prey is near.

On occasion, creatures of the sane world accidentally (or purposely) enter the Far Realm and survive, but not in any way that a sane creature would want to live.

Surviving creatures are absorbed by the Amoebic Sea (or some other unnamed entity), and after being taken apart they are rebuilt, transformed into creatures that can exist both in the Far Realm and in the real world of the Material Plane.

The kaortic hulk is one such type of creature, although it is impossible to say what the base creature might have once been. Too many centuries have passed, and even in that time, the creature has swelled to many times its original size. Some lore would have it that kaortic hulks all trace their lineage back to the original cat familiar of a mage who pushed too far into the Far Realm.

In any event, kaortic hulks are hungry predators that hunt realms that border on the unnatural. Voracious eaters, kaortic hulks quickly decimate populations if they spend too much time in one place. Thus, they roam far.

Combat

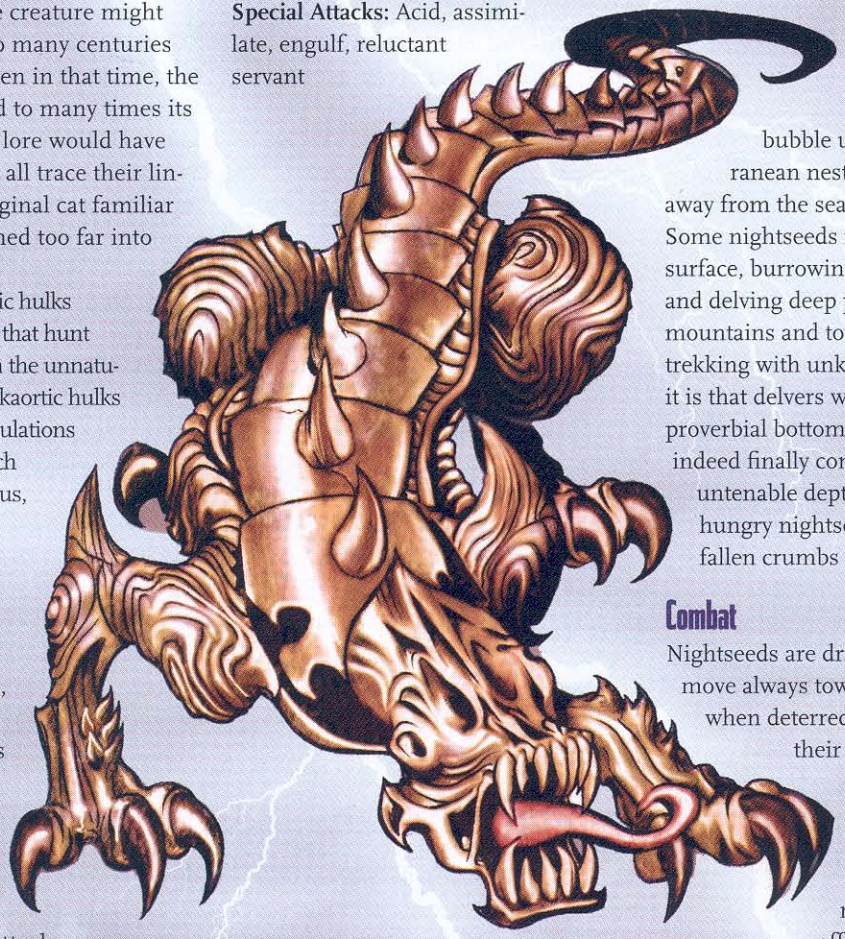
A kaortic hulk eats anything, even undead, constructs, or oozes. Despite its bulk, it attempts to use its spell-like abilities to maneuver itself into places where it couldn't normally reach, then attack its prey while initially invisible and within a sheath of silence.

Reluctant Servant (Ex): If a kaortic hulk is called into service through a spell or other effect, there is a 1% cumulative chance each round that it turns on the creature that summoned it.

Spell-like Abilities: 2/day—*gaseous form, spider climb, invisibility, silence.* Caster level 8th.

Nightseed

Huge Ooze (Extraplanar)
Hit Dice: 20d10+180 (290 hp)
Initiative: –5
Speed: Fly 50 ft. (10 squares) (perfect)
Armor Class: 3 (–2 size, –5 Dex), touch 3, flat-footed 3
Base Attack/Grapple: +15/+31
Attack: Slam +21 melee (3d6+12 plus 3d6 acid)
Full Attack: Slam +21 melee (3d6+12 plus 3d6 acid)
Space/Reach: 15 ft./10 ft.
Special Attacks: Acid, assimilate, engulf, reluctant servant



Special Qualities: Blindsight 500 ft., ooze traits, daylight vulnerability
Saves: Fort +15, Ref +1, Will +1
Abilities: Str 26, Dex 1, Con 28, Int —, Wis 1, Cha 1
Skills: —
Feats: —
Environment: Any
Organization: Solitary
Challenge Rating: 14
Treasure: None
Alignment: Always neutral
Advancement: —
Level Adjustment: —

Hardly distinguishable from the night itself is a vast aerial sack of pulsing, ravenous hunger. A faint glimmer of illumination reveals an irregularity deep in the squamous mass—a sinister collection of ganglia vibrating in time to a vague tonal pattern that somehow promises an unutterable and unendurable vision.

Nightseeds float with the night, preferring the dark of the moon to bubble up from the subterranean nests they use to shelter away from the searing light of day. Some nightseeds retreat far below the surface, burrowing below ocean beds and delving deep past the roots of mountains and toward the world's core, trekking with unknowable intent. Thus it is that delvers who fall into those proverbial bottomless chasms might indeed finally come to rest at some untenable depth, alone but for a hungry nightseed come looking for fallen crumbs from the surface.

Combat

Nightseeds are driven by hunger. They move always toward food, except when deterred by sunlight or by their own destruction.

Acid (Ex): A nightseed secretes a digestive acid that dissolves organic material, but does not affect stone, metal, clothing, or other dead material.

Assimilate (Su): An engulfed creature is partially assimilated into the nightseed's form and takes 20d6 points of damage. Any creature reduced to 0 or fewer hit points by this power is killed, entirely assimilated into the nightseed, leaving behind only a trace of fine dust. An assimilated creature's equipment is unaffected.

A creature that is partially assimilated into the nightseed (that is, a creature that has at least 1 hit point after being engulfed) grants the nightseed a number of temporary hit points equal to half the damage the

nightseed dealt for 1 hour. The creature is then expelled in an adjacent empty square.

A creature that is completely assimilated grants the nightseed a number of temporary hit points equal to the damage dealt. If the assimilated creature knows spells or possesses psionic powers, the nightseed gains the use of one of the spells or powers (chosen by the DM) as a spell-like or psi-like ability usable once. These spells and powers are treated as if cast or manifested by the original creature for the purposes of caster level and save DC.

Engulf (Ex): Although it can make slam attacks against opponents, a nightseed can also choose to simply move its bulk into the space occupied by that which it wishes to assimilate. It can attempt to engulf Large or smaller creatures as a standard action. It cannot make a slam attack during a round in which it engulfs. The nightseed merely has to move onto opponents, affecting as many as it can cover. Opponents can make attacks of opportunity against the nightseed, but if they do so they are not entitled to a saving throw. Those who do not attempt attacks of opportunity must succeed on a DC 28 Reflex save or be engulfed; on a success, they are pushed into an adjacent empty square (opponent's choice). Engulfed creatures are subject to the nightseed's ability to assimilate its foes. The save DC is Strength-based.

Reluctant Servant (Ex): If a nightseed is called into service through a spell or other effect, there is a 1% cumulative chance each round that it turns on the creature that summoned it.

Daylight Vulnerability: When exposed to natural daylight, a nightseed is reduced to taking only a single move action each round. If the exposure continues for 5 rounds, the nightseed evaporates completely away. When exposed to magical or otherwise simulated daylight, it is reduced to taking a single move action for 1d4+1 rounds before shaking off the effect.

Dream Keys

Anywhere the Far Realm has touched the world, misshapen and startling items are also found. Often, the Far Realm reaches into the world first through dreams. Those who wish may reach into such dreams and pry forth foul artifacts.

The preparations vary somewhat, depending on the particular artifact sought; however, the dream endured by the seeker is always fairly terrible and alarming.

The Dream: You flash into a screaming twilight abyss. Your limbs are not yours to move—in fact, where are they? You are helpless in the grasp of formless, churning void. You are moving, actually accelerating through the nothingness. Terrible sounds assault your senses, pounding rhythmically through your form. In this ghastly sound is concentrated all the primal, ultimate instability that lies beneath matter and behind time. Screaming, you plunge directly into it... and wake up.

Lore: Whenever you deal with a creature from the Far Realm, fail a save from a cerebrotic spell, read a tome about the Far Realm, or otherwise have some sort of contact with the Far Realm of any sort, the seed of a terrible idea is sown in your mind. A DC 21 Knowledge (the planes) check either personally made or made with the help of others more knowledgeable brings to mind the necessary ritual to plunge into the dream in just the proper way so that, upon waking, you emerge with a one of the keys described here. To this end, you must prepare for the dream in advance by burning the proper exotic incenses and expend other similar resources in the amount noted in the price entry of the key sought. As promised, upon waking, you find the desired key encasing your hand. Once a key has been donned, the wearer cannot remove the key without first receiving a *remove curse*. The key must then be cut from the hand of the wearer, inflicting 3d10 points of damage that cannot be healed naturally.





Key of the Call

The key of the call delivers into your left hand the power to summon forth Far Realm monstrosities.

Description: This item appears as a single leather gauntlet that would fit over the left hand of a humanoid creature.

Closer inspection reveals no seams in the leather gauntlet, as if it were grown rather than sown, or as if it were harvested directly from another creature with similar anatomy. The gauntlet seems always slicked with some sort of awful slime, greenish yellow and ominous.

When activated, the gauntlet glows pale green, and slime literally boils and flows from it in small rivulets.

Prerequisite: This item functions only for the character who personally plucked it from beyond the geometry of the sane. You must be able to cast spells of at least 5th level to use this item, even if you wrested it from nightmare. Wearing the key takes up a magic item slot on the body reserved for gloves.

Effect: Each of the effects of the *key of the call* is activated by a command word. Once per day you can call one of three different types of Far Realm creatures, as the spells of the same name, when the proper command word is given: *call amoebic crawler, call cranial encyster, call kaortic hulk*. Once a creature is called on a given day, the key cannot be used again until the next day.

Cerebrotic Escalation: You can attempt to escalate any of the command word-triggered abilities, as is described for each given spell, but you suffer the same chance of mishap as noted for that spell.

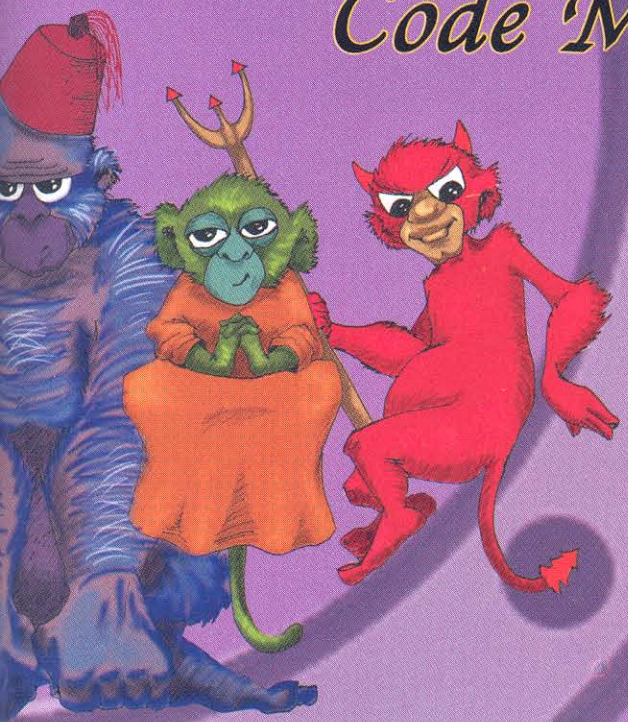
Personal Costs: On any day that the power of the *key of the call* is used, you suffer an instant malaise of spirit—you lose 4 hit points that can't be healed by any means, you lose access to a 4th-level and 5th-level spell slot, and you suffer a –3 penalty on all saves. These effects fade after one day, and do not reappear until the key is used again.

Moderate necromancy; CL 11th; Cannot be crafted; Price 2,160 gp; Weight 1 lb.

Key of Surpassing Dismay

The *key of surpassing dismay* delivers into your right hand the power to

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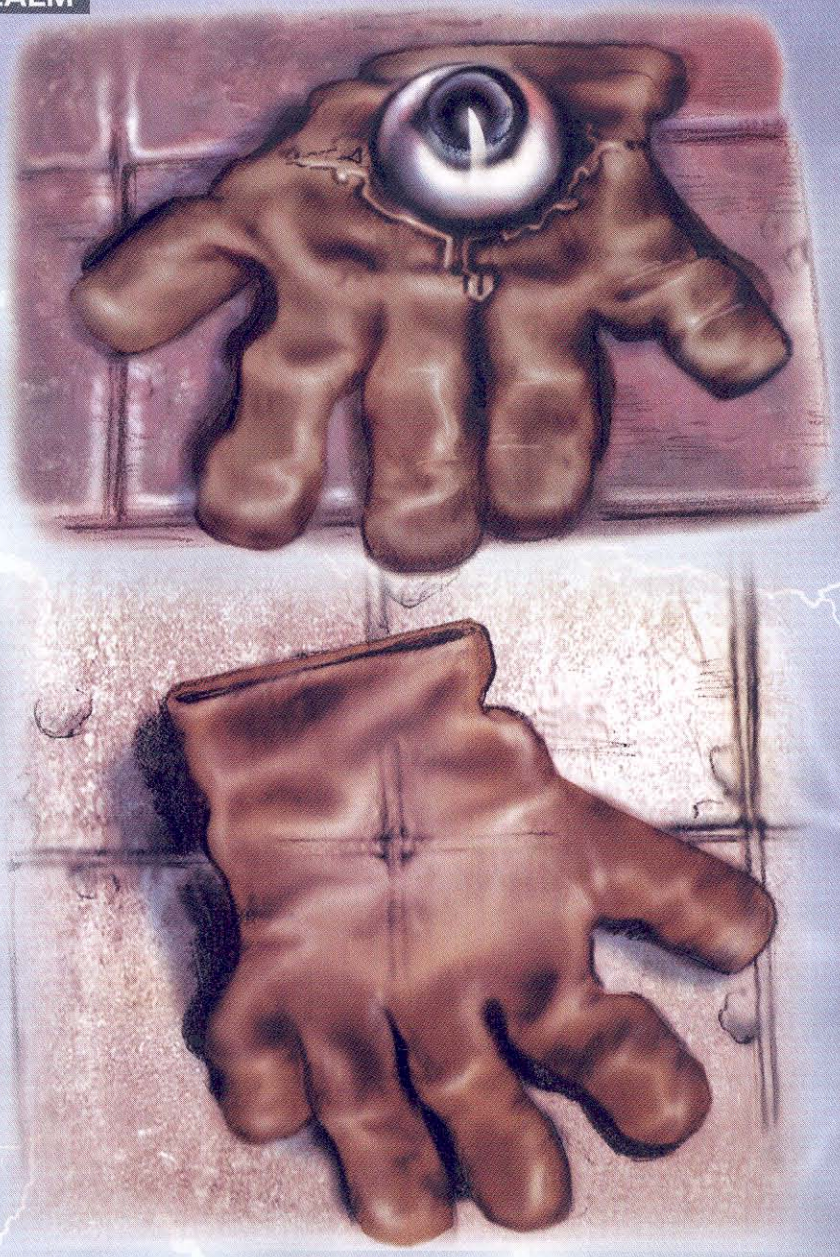
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bedevil and ultimately terrorize your foes to death.

Description: This item appears as a single leather gauntlet that would fit over the right hand of a humanoid creature.

Closer inspection reveals no seams in the leather gauntlet, as if it were grown rather than sown, or as if it were harvested directly from another creature with similar anatomy. A strangely lifelike eye symbol adorns the palm of the gauntlet. The eye is normally closed.

When the gauntlet is activated, the eye pops open on the gauntlet's palm, revealing a disturbingly lifelike orb that blinks and rolls in its socket. The eye glows with a vile light.

Prerequisite: This item functions only for the character who personally plucked it from beyond the geometry of the sane. Wearing the key takes up a magic item slot on the body reserved for gloves.

Effect: Each of the effects of the *key of surpassing dismay* is activated by a command word. Once per day you may trigger each of the following effects, as the spell of the same name: *aching dread* (DC 11) and *lingering raver* (DC 16).

Cerebrotic Escalation: As the *key of the call*.

Personal Costs: On any day that the power of the *key of surpassing dismay* is used, you suffer an instant malaise of spirit—you lose 4 hit points that can't be healed by any means, you are assessed a –1 penalty to your base attack bonus, and you suffer a –2 penalty on all your saving throws. These effects fade after one day, and do not reappear until the key is used again.

Moderate necromancy; CL 9th; Cannot be crafted; Price 3,000 gp; Weight 1 lb.

Key of the Traveler

The *key of the traveler* delivers into your left hand the power to move short distances, and far.

Description: This item appears as a single leather gauntlet that would fit over the left hand of a humanoid creature.

Closer inspection reveals no seams in the leather gauntlet, as if it were grown rather than sown, or as if it were harvested directly from another creature with similar anatomy. An even closer look reveals that the gauntlet (and the hand and forearm upon which it is worn) is not quite all there, as if it were partially phased into another reality.

When the gauntlet is activated, the gauntlet fades into complete invisibility, moments before the user makes a step through breaking dimensions.

Prerequisite: This item functions only for the character who personally plucked it from beyond the geometry of the sane. Wearing the key takes up a magic item slot on the body reserved for gloves.

Effect: Each of the effects of the *key of the traveler* is activated by a command word. Twice per day you can use *dimension rift* as the spell of the same name when you provide the proper command word.

Cerebrotic Escalation: You can attempt to escalate, as is described in the *dimension rift* spell, but you suffer the same chance of mishap as noted for that spell.

Personal Costs: On any day that the power of the *key of the traveler* is used, you suffer an instant malaise of spirit—you lose 4 hit points that cannot be healed by any means, suffer a –2 penalty on all skill checks and a –2 penalty on all saving throws. These effects fade after one day, and do not reappear until the key is used again.

Faint necromancy; CL 5th; Cannot be crafted; Price 5,200 gp; Weight 1 lb.



by Keith Baker • illustrated by Steve Prescott and David Wahlstrom



THE UMBRAGEN

SHADOW ELVES OF XEN'DRIK

In the *Eberron* campaign setting, the drow reside on the shattered continent of Xen'drik. The common image of the Xen'drik drow is one of a tribal hunter wearing chitin armor, his skin ritually scarred by acidic venom. Cruel and cunning, these nomadic drow are deadly hunters who own the shadows of Xen'drik and prey on giant and humanoid alike.

While the majority of the drow of Xen'drik live in tribes, there are exceptions—elves who have held onto the arcane secrets of the past, using them to develop strange new spells. The computer game *Dragonshard* reveals one of these hidden sects: the umbragen, also known as shadow elves.

This article provides an overview of the umbragen, allowing you to incorporate these enigmatic elves into your campaign. It provides the flavor of the race depicted in the *Dragonshard* real-time strategy game, but it is not intended to be a perfect map to the abilities of the umbragen units in *Dragonshard*.

History

Tens of thousands of years ago, elves were the slaves of the giants of Xen'drik. Elven legends claim that giant wizards created the drow by harnessing the essence of night and binding it to an elven frame. While this might be nothing more than myth, some drow did serve the giants during the great uprising, using stealth to penetrate the elven strongholds that the massive giants could never breach. While the majority of the drow fought the giants or simply sought to avoid the conflict entirely, the treachery of few turned the wider elven population against the dark elves. Even then, the drow were regarded with fear and distrust, and when the ancestors of the Aereni fled the dark elves were left to face the doom of Xen'drik alone. Soon the dragons came to Xen'drik, and the civilization of the giants fell in a blaze of dragonfire and mystical power. Hundreds of thousands died in the conflict, and the land was twisted by magical forces that modern wizards have yet to understand.

The ancestors of the umbragen escaped the worst of this cataclysm by fleeing beneath the surface of the world, delving into the realm of Khyber, the Dragon Below. The underworld was filled with its own terrors, but nothing so deadly as the final battles between giant and dragon. After a long and dangerous journey one tribe found sanctuary beneath a region known as the Ring of Storms (described in more detail in Dungeon #122). This subterranean fortress had been constructed and later abandoned by the Qabalrin, an isolated clan of elves whose power matched the mightiest giants. The Qabalrin were long dead when the tribe arrived—struck down in a disaster that some called divine vengeance—but their works remained.

Life in Khyber remained a constant struggle. Aberrations howled at the gates, while famine and plague ravaged the tribe as they fought to adapt to subterranean life. Searching for tools to aid in their struggle for survival, the tribe discovered a set of Qabalrin mystical inscriptions. These writings revealed ways to tap into a vast force of spiritual energy—a dark well the elves called the Umbra.

Over the course of generations, the elves performed terrible arcane rituals that bound body and soul to the Umbra, blending this shadowy force with elven flesh. From this point on, they were drow no more: they were the umbragen, shadow elves, the children of darkness.

The horrors of the underworld remained and the umbragen never knew peace. Deep within their cavern fortress the elders continued to plumb the secrets of the darkness, searching for ways to increase the power of their race. The concept of returning to the surface never occurred to them; the legends of the surface world were filled with slavery, war, and betrayal. Eventually, however, it became the only option. While the history of the umbragen was one of constant conflict, this usually involved random attacks by disorganized monsters. In 997 YK, a new force rose in the underworld. A daelkyr lord had stirred in the depths and the umbragen found themselves besieged by a disciplined force of beholders, mind flayers, and lesser aberrations. It is a vicious struggle and so far the shadow elves have been able to hold the aberrations at bay, but it is a losing battle. Recently, umbragen forces have been sent to the surface world, seeking any sort of weapon or power that might drive the aberrations back into the depths of Khyber. The umbragen fled one battle and they don't intend to be driven from their second home.

The *Dragonshard* real-time strategy game chronicles the umbragen attempt to seize the Heart of Siberys, a dragonshard of immense size charged with the energy of the Qabalrin. However, the quest for power could take the umbragen anywhere in Xen'drik—or even across the Thunder Sea and into Khorvaire.

Racial Description

The umbragen are an offshoot of the drow race twisted by generations of arcane experimentation and devotion to the powers of shadow.

Personality: A shadow elf has the personality of a predator. His fellow umbragen are his allies in the hunt, and they alone have his respect and loyalty. All other creatures are potential prey, unworthy of respect or pity. With this in mind, the shadow elf is always searching for ways to turn a situation to his advantage or to exploit weakness in a foe.

While he is ruthlessly efficient when required, if given the opportunity a shadow elf prefers to play with his prey. Conflict is the one pleasure of the umbragen, and a shadow elf would rather lead an opponent into an ambush than kill him outright. The umbragen are not fools however, and refuse to throw away victory for a fool's game. If the odds are even a shadow elf draws out the conflict to savor the victory.

Umbragen society is split into two paths: the Council of War and the Vault of Shadows, with a king who sits on both councils. Those who follow the path of war battle on the front lines while the students of the Vault search for ways to increase the mystical power of the race. Rank is earned through conflict, and any leader—even the king—can be challenged by a direct subordinate. These ascendancy duels take on many different forms of challenge, as there is more to being a general than skill at arms and the strongest fighter is not necessarily the best commander. While it might seem that this policy would create a very chaotic society, challenges are relatively rare. Leaders hold their positions by maintaining the respect of the people, and only an incompetent leader risks being challenged. Rank is not a matter of personal ego—it is a question of who can ensure the survival of the race, and true leaders are revered and valued by those beneath them.

Physical Description: Shadow elves have jet black skin, pale hair, and slender elven builds. At a distance, umbragen are indistinguishable from drow, but up close, a few distinctive features become visible. The eyes of a shadow elf are pure black, with no iris or white, while the skin of the Umbragen has an oily gleam, almost as if liquid shadow was flowing across their skin.

Alignment: As a race, the umbragen tend to be lawful evil. They believe that order and discipline is vital to the continued survival of their race, and they are willing to do anything in the pursuit of this goal. They expect treachery from other creatures and thus feel no remorse for actions they take against their enemies (or temporary allies).

Dragonmarks: Umbragen do not possess dragonmarks.

Religion: The shadow elves believe that the Umbra slowly devours the soul of everything it touches, including the umbragen themselves. Those who are closest to the Umbra become colder and more ruthless as their dark powers grow. To the umbragen, the exchange of power for their souls is a fair one and the people respect this sacrifice. Most umbragen rulers possess the Dark Blood feat.

An outside observer might come to the conclusion that these elves worship the Shadow, which is true in a sense. Umbragen clerics should use the listing for the Shadow to determine their domains.

Language: The umbragen speak Elven. However, they have been separated from the Aereni for tens of thousands of years and their use of the elven tongue has drifted over those years. When umbragen first encounter elves of other cultures, the DM might want to require a DC 5 Intelligence check to understand the full meaning of a statement. However, after a brief period the speakers learn to bridge this gap. Umbragen also learn Undercommon as a result of their long conflict with the creatures of Khyber. The Common tongue has never been a part of their culture and an umbragen who selects this as a bonus language has presumably made contact with explorers from Khorvaire.

Names: A shadow elf begins life with a simple birth name. These are typically monosyllabic, reminiscent of changeling naming patterns. When the elf embraces the Umbra—represented by acquiring an umbragen racial feat or a level in one of the classes linked to the shadows—he chooses his final name.



A SECRET RACE

The umbragen have avoided all contact with the people of the surface world for thousands of years, and only recently emerged to escape the forces of Khyber. As a result, Knowledge skills and bardic knowledge cannot provide any specific information about the umbragen. If they become a more significant force in the world, this would change. For example, the events of *Dragonshard* chronicle a major conflict between the umbragen and the Church of the Silver Flame; if this event actually unfolds in your campaign, a follower of the flame could make a Knowledge (religion) or bardic knowledge check (DC 25) to see if he had heard of the battles.

Umbragen possess no knowledge of the outside world. A shadow elf who possesses ranks in Knowledge (geography), Knowledge (history), or Knowledge (local) can only make skill checks to gain information related to Xen'drik. As the character encounters foreigners and travels beyond Xen'drik, the DM can reduce this restriction—first applying penalties to Knowledge checks and ultimately allowing normal checks.

Male Names: Dulos, Hulaje, Jalaen, Satros, Turaje.

Female Names: Delake, Haeri, Mekali, Solake, Ulari.

Umbragen Adventurers: The majority of umbragen encountered in the world are searching for weapons to use in the war against the forces of Khyber: powerful artifacts, forgotten spells, or anything else that could turn the tide. To find what they seek they also need to learn about the surface world. A group might encounter an umbragen agent who is simply gathering information about the people and cultures of the world above. There are also a few shadow elves who have abandoned the conflict of their people, choosing to seize a place among the soft people of the upper world instead of battling the endless hordes of Khyber.

Umbragen Racial Traits

Umbragen are drow elves. What makes the umbragen unique is their bond to shadow, reflected by racial feats. Except where noted below, umbragen possess all of the racial traits of drow elves as defined in the *Monster Manual*.

- +2 racial bonus on Hide and Move Silently checks. This replaces the drow bonus to saving throws against spells and spell-like effects.
- Weapon Proficiencies: Longbow, shortbow, longsword, and rapier. These replace the standard drow weapon proficiencies.
- Automatic Languages: Elven, Undercommon. Bonus Languages: Common, Draconic, Giant, and Terran.
- Favored Class: Warlock. This class is described in *Complete Arcane*; if you are not using this sourcebook, use sorcerer as the favored class.

Touched by Darkness

From the moment of birth, a shadow elf feels the call of the Umbra within him. It is a whisper hidden beneath his thoughts, a cold shroud wrapped around his heart. Through discipline and devotion an umbragen becomes a conduit of this power, shaping the shadows to produce a wide array of effects. These arts are reflected by racial feats and the classes most commonly found among the umbragen: the warlock and the soulknife. Shadowdancers are also found among the umbragen, but they are less common than these other two classes; a character must be at least 8th level to take his first level of shadowdancer, and the prestige class lacks the pure offensive power the umbragen gain from these other traditions.

The Umbral Warlock

Shadows flow through the blood of the umbragen. An umbral warlock learns to harness this energy to deadly effect. The most obvious manifestation of this power is the warlock's eldritch

Shadow Soulknife

Requirements

To take a shadow soulknife substitution level, a character must be an umbragen on the cusp of taking 1st, 3rd, or 6th level in the soulknife class.

For further examples of similar substitution levels, see Chapter 2 of the *Planar Handbook*.

Class Skill

Shadow soulknife substitution levels grant the class skills of the base soulknife class, plus Knowledge (dungeoneering) and Survival (Wis). Replace Knowledge (psionics) with Knowledge (arcana).

Skill Points per Level: 4 + Int modifier.

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Shadow Soulknife Racial Substitution Levels

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+0	+0	+2	+0	Mind blade, Stealthy, Weapon Focus (mind blade)
6th	+4	+2	+5	+5	Mind blade enhancement +1, Shadow bow
9th	+6/+1	+3	+6	+6	Greater Weapon Focus (mind blade), Improved shadow bow

bolt; a blast of chilling darkness that vaporizes solid matter, leaving only shadows behind. This is only the least of his powers. A gifted warlock can take to the air on spectral wings (*fell flight*), crush an opponent with tendrils of shadow (*chilling tentacles*), or even merge with the shadows themselves (*dark discorporation* and *path of shadows*). *Brimstone blast* produces flames formed from pure shadow, yet they still burn like mundane fire. Other common invocations include *beshadowed blast, darkness, devil's sight, enervating shadow, entropic warding, frightful blast, hellrime blast, hungry darkness, miasmic cloud, tenacious plague, utterdark blast,* and *wall of gloom*. Visually, these powers always reflect their umbral source. The creatures in a *tenacious plague* are not natural insects; they are formed of solid shadow and fade away at the end of the effect. *Entropic warding* wraps the caster in an umbral shroud.

Warlock is the favored class of the umbragen, and many umbragen merge the shadowy talents of the warlock with the skills of other classes. The pious templar blends the gifts of the warlock with the healing powers of the cleric, while the dread knight strikes down his enemies with shadows and steel. Regardless of class, any time an umbragen spellcaster uses magic the DM should consider ways that the appearance of the spell can reflect the source of its power. A *Tenser's floating disk* should be formed from solid darkness. *Color spray* should be a cone of whirling shadows. Even *cure light wounds* could manifest as solid shadows that cling to the flesh and bind injuries. Whatever the class of the caster, umbral magic should be disturbing and very distinctive.

The warlock is presented in *Complete Arcane*. If you are not using this book in your campaign, the favored class of the umbragen should be changed to sorcerer. The warlock is well suited to the umbragen because of its combat focus—the use of light armor, d6 Hit Die, and unlimited eldritch blasts—but the spontaneous arcane abilities of the sorcerer are a good substitute.

The Shadow Soulknife

The sword and bow have always been important to the umbragen; their ancestors were accomplished archers long before they fled to the depths of Khyber. The shadow soulknife studies the art of blade and bow, and learns to forge deadly weapons from the pure essence of shadow. This is a purely magical effect, and the shadow soulknife must concentrate to maintain his weapon while in an antimagic field, just as a normal soulknife is affected by an antipsionic field. The psychic strike remains unaffected by this; it is still a mind-affecting effect, blasting the spirit of the victim with the pure horror that lies within the Umbra.

The shadow soulknives are the eyes of the umbragen. For generations they have patrolled the deep caverns and during surface operations the soulknives spy on enemy troops and locate mission objectives. As a result, many shadow soulknives also acquire ranger levels, merging the deadly weaponry of the soulknife with the reconnaissance skills of the ranger.

Shadow soulknife is a racial substitution level, providing options that many umbragen take in lieu of the normal abilities of the class. A shadow soulknife can choose up to three racial substitution levels: one at 1st level, one at 6th level, and the last at 9th level.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the shadow soulknife's racial substitution levels.

Stealthy: A shadow soulknife gains Stealthy as a bonus feat. This reflects a minor ability to draw on the Umbra to create a minor cloak of clinging shadows and quiet brooding.

Shadow Bow (Su): At 6th level, a shadow soulknife expands his ability to reshape his mind blade. As a full round action, he can change his mind blade to replicate a shortbow (damage 1d6, 60 ft. range increment). The bow maintains the enhancement bonus and abilities possessed by the previous form of the mind blade; however, the soulknife cannot channel his psychic strike



through his bow. When making attacks with the shadow bow, the soulknife forms arrows out of pure umbral energy. This is an automatic action that requires no effort on the part of the character, but the shadow soulknife can only form two arrows per round. As a result, a character with multiple attacks might not be able to make a full attack using the bow.

The soulknife cannot fire normal arrows using the shadow bow, and weapon feats based on the mind blade—such as Weapon Focus or Improved Critical—do not transfer to the shadow bow. The soulknife does not add his strength bonus to the damage he inflicts with the shadow bow.

Improved Shadowbow (Su): At 9th level a shadow soulknife gains an improved ability to manifest the shadow bow. He can choose to have the bow replicate a composite shortbow (damage 1d6, 70 ft.-range increment) or composite longbow (damage 1d8, 110 ft.-range increment). The shadow bow replicates a composite bow matched to the strength of the soulknife, allowing him to add his Strength modifier to the damage that he inflicts. He may produce up to three arrows each round when making a full attack. In addition, he may use his psychic strike with a ranged attack. However, the damage of the psychic strike is reduced by one die—so a 9th level soulknife could only add 1d8 to a ranged attack using a psychic strike. The soulknife cannot use the knife to the soul ability in conjunction with the shadow bow.

Racial Feats

The warlock and the soulknife are two possible ways to represent the powers of the umbragen. In addition, the touch of the Umbra can take other forms. These feats provide additional abilities that reflect the dark powers of the umbragen. Some, like Shadow Shift, are common talents that any shadow elf may possess. Others represent a mastery of umbral energies only found among the champions of the race.

Unless otherwise mentioned, these feats are extraordinary abilities.

Cloak of Shadows [Racial]

You can draw the light out of your immediate surroundings.

Prerequisite: Umbragen race, Shadow Shift, warlock level 1.

Benefit: While you are in shadow form, you may choose to reduce the lighting within a 10-foot radius around you to shadowy. You may maintain this effect as long as you wish, although it ends immediately if you are killed, rendered unconscious, or leave shadow form.

Cloak of Shadows is a supernatural ability.

Special: Multiple characters with Cloak of Shadows cannot stack the effects of this feat in order to reduce an area of bright illumination to full darkness.

Dark Blood [Racial]

It is said that the Umbra devours all that it touches, and you are caught in its web. Your efforts have brought you power—but the Umbra has its hooks in your soul. Your emotions are slipping away and when you die the Umbra will claim the last vestiges of your soul.

Prerequisite: Umbragen race, three or more umbragen racial feats.

Benefit: Your racial spell resistance is increased by +2. This feat counts as two feats for determining the number of times per day that you can enter shadow form.

Special: A character with this feat cannot be raised from the dead, resurrected, reincarnated, or otherwise returned to life by magical or psionic means.

Dread Shadow [Racial]

By filling yourself with the power of the Umbra, you can expand your size and strength.

Prerequisite: Umbragen race, two or more umbragen racial feeats.

Benefit: Once per day, as a full round action, you may call on the power of the Umbra to expand your size by one category, duplicating the effects of *enlarge person*. You must be in shadow form to use and maintain this effect. Aside from this restriction, you may maintain this effect as long as you wish, although it immediately ends if you are killed, rendered unconscious, or leave shadow form.

Dread Shadow is a supernatural ability.

Indistinct [Racial]

Your shadow form is especially wraith-like and indistinct.

Prerequisite: Umbragen race, Shadow Shift.

Benefit: While you are in shadow form, you have no scent and leave practially no trail behind. You cannot be tracked or located with the Scent ability. The DC to track you using the Survival skill increases by +4.

One with the Darkness [Racial]

Your ties to the Umbra are more powerful than most.

Prerequisite: Umbragen race, Shadow Shift.

Benefit: You may assume shadow form as a free action. In addition, you are treated as two levels higher for determining the duration of your shadow shift.

Shadow Shift [Racial]

You can wrap yourself in the essence of the Umbra, becoming shadowy and indistinct.

Prerequisite: Umbragen race.

Benefit: As a move action, you may assume shadow form. This provides you with a +2 circumstance bonus on Hide skill checks and a +5 circumstance bonus on Disguise skill checks made to conceal your identity.

You may only enter shadow form a number of times per day equal to 1+ the number of umbragen racial feats you possess. You return to your normal state after a number of minutes equal to your total character level. You may also leave shadow form as a standard action. If you are killed or rendered unconscious, you automatically return to your normal state.

Strength of the Shadows [Racial]

You can channel the power of the Umbra to enhance dark magic.

Prerequisite: Umbragen race, Shadow Shift.

Benefit: When you cast a spell with the shadow or darkness descriptor while in shadow form, your caster level is increased by +1. In addition, the saving throw DC of such spells is also increased by +1.

Sustaining Darkness [Racial]

As you grow ever closer to the Umbra, you can draw sustenance from the shadows themselves.

Prerequisite: Umbragen race, Dark Blood, character level 12th.

Benefit: While resting in total darkness, you heal damage at twice the normal rate. As long as you spend at least 8 hours of the day in total darkness, you do not need to eat or drink.

Voices of the Void [Racial]

The souls bound within the Umbra whisper around you, although only you can hear them. With a mental effort you can control these silent voices and get them to pronounce the verbal components of your spells.

Prerequisite: Umbragen race, Indistinct, Shadow Shift.

Benefit: While you are in shadow form and in an area of shadowy or no illumination, you may remove the verbal components of any spells that you cast or invocations that you perform. This has no effect on the spell slot used by the spell. This ability does not function within the area of a *silence* or similar magical effect.

Special: This feat cannot be used with bard spells.

Wings of the Wraith [Racial]

A skilled warlock can take to the air on wings of dark energy. You have mastered this power and when you assume your shadow form you can strengthen your wings and fly at great speed.

Prerequisite: Umbragen race, Shadow Shift, *fell flight* invocation.

Benefit: When you use *fell flight* while in shadow form, your flight speed is increased by 30 feet.

by Matt Forbeck • illustrated by Ramón Pérez

COMING HOME





The explosion blasted Kandler, the Brelander, from his feet, and the soldier tumbled back down the outside edge of the crater. The heat singed the Brelander's clothing and his short-cropped, dark hair so that he left a smoking trail behind him as he rolled down the rocky gray slope. He crunched to a stop with his hard-muscled ribs against a large rock.

The corpse-gray fog surrounding Kandler was thick and cold, like a mist escaping from a grave.

It blocked out the sun and sky and made the rugged warrior feel like he was walking through a cloud. The unforgiving ground beneath him provided the only evidence he wasn't in the sky.

Kandler scrambled to his knees and then his feet, holding his side. His dark eyes scanned the fog for signs of his companions as he pressed against his ribs. They were sore but unbroken.

"What happened?" Kandler asked. His voice was hoarse and dry. His lips felt like they'd been scraped raw.

"A fireball spell," Mardak said. The Cyran soldier had come to a stop a few yards above Kandler. The lean, hawk-faced man dusted himself off as he got to his feet and ran a hand through his dark hair. His face had been flash-baked red, just like Kandler's. "I'd have thought a warrior like you would have encountered such a thing before."

Mardak smirked at Kandler.

The expression grated on the Brelander's nerves. Although he'd come here to help his Cyran friends, he wondered if they'd ever really accept him. After all, it was their homeland that had been utterly destroyed in the Day of Mourning, not his.

"Never that close," Kandler said.

"We've always been too smart," a voice growled over the warrior's shoulder. "At least until now."

Kandler looked back to see Burch climbing up the hill toward him, and he smiled to see his friend safe. The shifter, shorter than the humans, moved with the rangy sureness of a predator as he loped low and fast toward Kandler, his yellow, wolflike eyes always darting about, hunting for new threats. The shagginess of Burch's inky mane and the hair standing on the back of his arms and along his bare, clawed feet added to the impression.

"I told you we should have brought Priscinta along," said a voice further up the slope. The muscle-bound Rislinto waved down at the others. Kandler liked the blacksmith-turned-fighter. He had the easy way about him of someone for whom killing people wasn't a calling. The man's skin still stood out pale against his red, short-cropped hair and bushy beard.

"Someone had to stay with the children," Mardak said as he looked up at Rislinto. "How did you manage to escape unscathed?"

Rislinto grinned as he hefted a dwarven warhammer in his meaty fist. Kandler had once asked the man why he would carry such a weapon instead of a sword.

"You're no dwarf," Kandler had said, looking up at the man towering over him.

"I'm a blacksmith," Rislinto had replied, a wistful expression on his face as he considered the weapon held in his hands. "It just feels right."

Kandler had nodded in understanding at his Cyran friend, just as he did now. Rislinto lumbered over toward the others, cutting his way through the mist like a barge through a stew-thick fog. "I'm slow, remember?" the blacksmith said with just a hint of mischief sparkling in his eye. "You three reached the crest before me."

"Score one for taking your time," Kandler said with a smile. It faded quickly. "Right now, we need to move fast." He turned to the shifter, who'd served with him for the past three years.

When the Last War had finally ended, Kandler had told Burch he needed to go to Cyre—or to the Mournland that now sprawled in its place, surrounded by a miles-thick border of nearly impenetrable mists. "For Esprë," he'd told his friend, although that wasn't the whole truth. His elven stepdaughter wasn't thrilled about moving from Sharn into the wilderness outside the Mournland, and he wasn't convinced it was a good place to take a child either.

The shifter had raised an eyebrow at him. "For her mother, you mean."

Kandler had nodded at that. He hadn't realized it until his friend had given it voice, but it was true. He needed to bury his wife, but to do that he'd have to find her first.

"Burch," Kandler said, "take another peek over that ridge. Try not to get your head blown off."

"On it, boss." The shifter clambered up the slope on all fours, darting past Mardak and Rislinto. If Burch had a tail, Kandler could almost have convinced himself that his friend was a wolf, a thought he had considered more than once. He let that thought slip from him as his friend disappeared into the mists.

Mardak glared down at Kandler, scorn filling his eyes. "I don't recall putting you in charge, Brelander."

Kandler drew his sword and started up the hill after Burch. "I'm not," he said as he passed Mardak.

This wasn't an argument Kandler cared to have here and now. He'd joined with Mardak's people because they had hailed from the same lands as Esprïna, Kandler's wife, now four years dead, but there was little love lost between him and the Cyran. Mardak had commanded a Cyran scouting force that was scouring through the Seawall Mountains, looking for signs of a secondary goblin army coming up north from Darguun, on the Day of Mourning. Rislinto had been a part of that force too.

Breland and Cyre had been at war on that day, right up until Cyre ceased to exist. While King Boranel ir'Wynarn of Breland had granted all Cyran survivors the right of refuge within his nation after the catastrophe, some animosity between the peoples still lingered. The tension between Kandler and Mardak testified to that.

Mardak's eyes followed Kandler until the Brelander passed Rislinto. The bear-like man shrugged. "I still think we should have brought Priscinta," he said in his deep, rumbling voice.

"She's a knight, not a wizard." Mardak scowled as he followed Kandler up the slope.

As Kandler reached the slope's top, he dropped to his hands and knees and crept up the last few yards to join Burch. The shifter lay there at the crest, peering into the crater below.

The crater looked like a moon-sized giant had come down and scooped away the land with a massive ladle. There was little left in it but exposed rock and a thick blanket of ash.

The stony sides of the bowl fell away sharply toward the crater floor many yards below. The crater itself looked to be a mile across. No tree, bush, or river broke the plainness. A few flickering lights danced in the distance, creating

mysterious patterns that Kandler could not decipher.

"I can see across it," Kandler said in amazement. "This tight against the Mournland's misty borders, I didn't think that would be possible."

"As I said before, there is something special about this place," Mardak said as he and Rislinto crept up to join Kandler and Burch.

"I thought Priscinta said that," Kandler said. He couldn't resist the urge to needle the man.

"My wife and I consult on these matters constantly," Mardak said, a hint of petulance tainting his tone. "We speak with one voice."

Kandler snorted in disbelief. "I heard her say she wanted to come."

"I've never heard tell of a place like this," Rislinto said. The big man clearly wanted to change the subject—he didn't care for confrontation—and Kandler was willing to let him. "The borders of the Mournland are supposed to be filled with these mists."

"You mean Cyre," Mardak said.

Rislinto's face fell as he seemed to realize his failure to choose his words carefully had moved the conversation from one sore subject to another.

"Cyre's dead," said Burch. Even Kandler winced at this. He knew the shifter had little patience for Mardak, but he had hoped Burch would be more careful about it this close to the Mournland.

Mardak raised an arm and reached out to strike Burch, but the shifter scampered easily out of his reach. "Cyre is not dead!" Mardak said, raging at Burch. "A land cannot die."

"It's been four years since the Day of Mourning," Kandler said evenly as he shifted his grip on his sword, readying himself in case Mardak decided to attack him too. "Cyre doesn't seem to be coming back."

"Not yet," Mardak said, his voice both exasperated and desperate, a wounded man who had to give this speech a dozen times before. As he spoke, his indignation lifted him to his feet. "Time will heal even that wound if good men stay the course and stand against the horrors of this world!"

A sharp explosion cut off Mardak, and a scorching shockwave slammed into him and sent him tumbling back down the hill. The others, still lying on the slope, covered their heads against the blast of heat and the deafening report.

When it was over, Burch glanced at Rislinto. "Think that'll teach your countryman to keep his mouth shut?"

Breland and Cyre had been at war on that day, right up until Cyre ceased to exist.

"I am unharmed!" Mardak shouted up from somewhere in the mists below. It was as much a defiant protest as a report.

Rislinto sighed and shook his large, round head. "He's a good man," he said softly to Kandler and Burch. "He's a great leader. Losing Cyre nearly crushed him. The idea of founding a town here somewhere—anywhere in what was once Cyre—is what keeps him going."

Kandler nodded then turned to Burch. He was eager to deal with the subject at hand. "What do you think's going on out there? That's twice someone's let loose a fireball of some sort at us, and I haven't seen a soul to cast the spell, not even a goblin shaman with a stolen wand."

The shifter ran a rough hand through his mane, brushing the gray ash from his ragged, black hair. He snarled and flexed his arms, letting the animal side of his nature take hold for a moment. The slits in his yellow pupils pulled tight as he stuck his nose into the air and sniffed about like a wolf hunting for the scent of a wounded deer.

"No one's there," Burch said. The shifter prowled forward on all fours and peered over the edge of the crater again. "No one alive, at least," the shifter said.

Kandler edged up beside him. "What are those?" Kandler said, pointing at the lights flickering in the distance. They were in different places now, both to the left and right, wandering along the far side of the crater with some sort of purpose. They seemed to be patrolling the place like a pack of animals guarding their home.

"Living spells," said Burch, echoing Kandler's thoughts.

"That's madness," Mardak said, his normal sarcasm blended with a bit of awe. "I've heard these rumors as well, but—spells cast during Cyre's final moments as a free land, now never ending, always searching for breathing creatures to kill out of some twisted jealousy of their shadow lives. Can it be true?"

Kandler looked at the twice-blasted Cyran soldier. "Those blisters didn't get on your face by themselves," he said.

"Even so," said Rislinto, "I've never heard of them acting like this. They're supposed to be magical machines of death. Are you saying these beasts are guarding the place?"

"It's possible," Kandler said. "This is a special place, right? Maybe no other place like it in the whole Mournland. It only stands to reason that someone else might want it."

Mardak nodded, trying to seem wise as he mouthed words that Kandler knew belonged to the man's wife. "I feared as much when I first heard rumors that such a place might exist. If it was as wonderful as I suspected, it would likely be inhabited."

Kandler looked out over the wasteland of the crater. A breeze swept down through the place, stirring up swirls of choking ash.

"'Wonderful' must mean something different to Cyrans," Burch said.

"We should be grateful," Mardak said, ignoring the remark. "These creatures have kept this valley free from other intruders. If we can remove them, we shall have the entire place to ourselves."

"How?" said Kandler.

Mardak's face fell at the Brelander's appeal to reason. "What do you mean?" he said. "They are spells, magical constructs mutated by their strange fates. We will destroy them."

Rislinto nodded as he tried to wrap his head around this notion. Kandler let his forehead fall onto his sword arm.

Burch stared at Mardak and echoed Kandler, "How?"

"Speak plainly," Mardak said, his anger flushing his face even redder than his burns. "If you wish to question my leadership then challenge me and be done with it!"

Kandler put up a hand. "He can't get any plainer. How do you think we can destroy these things? They're spells."

Mardak grimaced. "Rislinto has his hammer. Burch has his crossbow. You and I have our swords. What more do brave souls need?"

The air around the four warriors began to warp with heat, and a crackling noise filled the air. As the four got to their knees, a blazing ball of fire hurtled up to the lip of the crater, crested it, and glided to a halt right behind them. It pulsed there for a moment like a miniature, angry sun.

"I think," Kandler said, "we're about to find out."

The four soldiers stood up and started to run. Before they got more than three steps away, the living fireball exploded. The blazing blast knocked Kandler into the air and out over the crater's rim. He tucked himself into a ball and tried to roll with the impact when he landed.

Kandler struck the crater's steep, rocky wall at an angle. The impact rolled him out flat and shoved the air from his lungs. Before he could catch his breath, he started to slide.

The ash-covered crater wall offered few places for Kandler to find purchase. As he skidded down the face of the crater, he stabbed out with his hands and stomped down with his feet, desperate to find some way to slow or even stop his descent. The ash he stirred up as he went swirled all around him, getting into his mouth, eyes, and nose, blinding and choking him.

Kandler's thoughts went to Esprë. His stepdaughter hadn't wanted him to go on this expedition. Since her mother's death, she'd worried about him incessantly, fearful she would lose him as well. She had never known her father or any other family. Kandler was all she had left in the world.

As he slid downward, the grade of the crater's wall grew gentler, but his efforts became more desperate. Just when he thought his legs might give out, his efforts paid off. He ground to a halt with his legs buried under the foot-tall mound of ash he'd plowed before him.

Kandler wiped the ash from his eyes and snapped his head about. Far above, the lights of the living fireball that had just blasted him peeked over the crater's rim. The creature wavered back and forth for a moment and then drew back behind the rim.

"Okay, boss?" Burch said. The shifter padded over to Kandler from where he'd managed to come to a rest himself. Gray ash streamed from his mane and his furred arms and legs as he moved, lending him a ghostly look.

Kandler nodded and let Burch help him out of the ash in which he sat half-buried. "Nothing a long bath couldn't take care of. How about the others?"

"Help!" Mardak called.

Kandler and Burch looked further down the slope to where Mardak stood waving up at them. The ash coated the thin Cyran from head to toe. "I can't find Rislinto!" he said.

Kandler and Burch scanned the crater wall for any sign of the man. From their vantage point, they could see the trail the burly man had made as his form plowed through the ash. The shifter spotted him first and pointed down at a pair of gray-coated boots sticking out of the ash. Their toes pointed back up toward the crater's rim, and their soles stuck straight into the air.

Kandler began edging his way over to where Rislinto lay buried. Burch darted past him and beat both Kandler and Mardak to the man. The shifter grabbed the big man by his exposed ankles and started to pull.

"Is he dead?" Mardak said. "He was right about Priscinta. She has a scroll her father gave to her as a wedding gift. With its power, she could raise the dead."

Burch scowled at Mardak as the Cyran and Kandler reached his side. "Tell me again why you're not with the kids instead."

Mardak was about to snarl a reply when Kandler interrupted him. "He's kicking!"

Kandler pointed at the boots flailing about in Burch's hands. All three of them dug into the ash with both hands, clawing their way through the fine, gray grit until they found Rislinto's back.

The bulk of the ash above him removed, Rislinto shoved down with his thick arms and pushed himself free from the choking dust. He roared as he found air again and then tossed back his head to gulp it in. He inhaled fistfuls of dust as he did, and he twisted over onto his side to hack it out of his lungs.

A moment later, Rislinto flipped back over onto his knees and started scrabbling through the ash. He used his hands to scoop the ash out of the way as he dug his way back to where he'd been buried. "My hammer," he said between coughs. Mardak knelt next to his friend and started to shove the ash aside too.

"Don't worry about that now," Kandler said.

"I need my hammer," Rislinto said. The skin on the back of his neck was scorched, but it didn't seem to bother him.

"It'll only slow you down," Kandler said.

The burly man raised his head and glanced around. To the south, a blazing ball of light skittered along the ashes toward the soldiers.

"More," Burch said. The shifter pointed to other lights coming from the north and northeast.

"We have to leave now," Kandler said.

"But his hammer," Mardak started.

Rislinto stood up, almost slipping in the ash as he did. "He's right," the big man told Mardak.

Mardak scowled at Kandler and then looked up at the crater's rim. "It is too steep to climb here. Those things would catch us before we got halfway up."

Kandler pointed down toward the center of the crater. "If we can't go up, we should go down. If they follow us, we might be able to outrace them back to the rim. Either way, it should give us more room to play with.

"Our lives are some kind of game to you then?"

Kandler shook his head. "Call it what you like. I still plan to win."

Burch started down the crater wall, half-walking and half-sliding toward the floor below. The others followed in his wake, doing their best not to stumble. Within minutes, they reached the bottom of the crater.

The land here was flatter, although it still sloped toward the center of the crater. For a while, the ash thinned to less than an inch thick, and Kandler suspected a single good rain would turn it straight to mud. As they closed on the center, though, the ash grew deeper. Soon the warriors were in it up to their knees again.

"The wind must push most of the ash up against the crater's walls," Rislinto said. "But here it's almost like a lake."

"It's probably where the original explosion created the crater," Kandler said. "It must dimple down underneath all this. Still, it's not that far across. More like a pond."

"I told you this would be the perfect place for our new settlement," Mardak said.

Kandler looked back. Two of the living fireballs still followed them, crackling with deadly intent. Kandler wondered what it would sound like if they roared, and then he remembered how they sounded when they exploded.

"Sure," Kandler said, "an ash-filled crater smack on the edge of the Mournland. What more could you want? Toss in a pack of living spells that like to hunt by exploding and you've got the perfect home."

"This is our homeland," Mardak said. "We will reclaim it a foot at a time, no matter how long it takes."

"You picked a great spot to start."

"More coming," Burch said. The shifter pointed toward the north, south, and east. At least five more sets of lights danced in the distance. "They're spreading out, surrounding us."

"Are these things intelligent?" Mardak said, wonder edging into his voice.

The shifter shrugged. "They know how to hunt."

"Maybe we need to show them we are not easy prey," Mardak said. He pointed at Burch's crossbow. "Do you care to display your expertise?"

"I don't think that's so smart," Kandler said.

"I didn't ask for your thoughts," Mardak said. "I am the leader of this expedition, and I am ordering Burch to fire a shot into the nearest of those things."

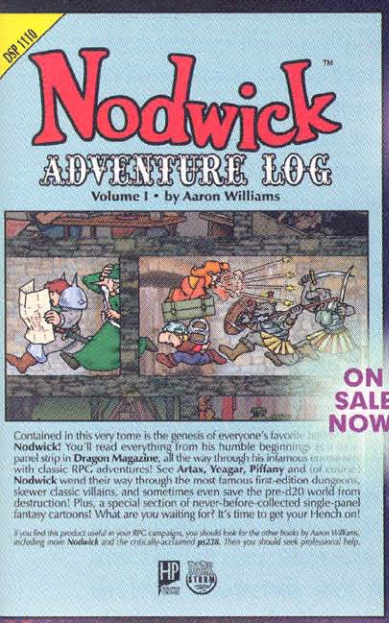
Burch looked at Kandler, who shrugged at his friend. "Your bolts," Kandler said. "Your call."

The shifter squinted at the nearest of the flickering, floating balls of fire. It had stopped coming closer, but it wandered back and forth in the distance, prowling like a panther. "It's waiting," Burch said.

"Then the time to strike is now," Mardak said, "before those things have more time to prepare."

Burch cocked his head and raised a black eyebrow on his wide face. "Could be." He unslung his crossbow from across his back and ran the crank back until the string was taut. He fitted a bolt into the device and aimed it toward the crater's rim, back the way they'd come.

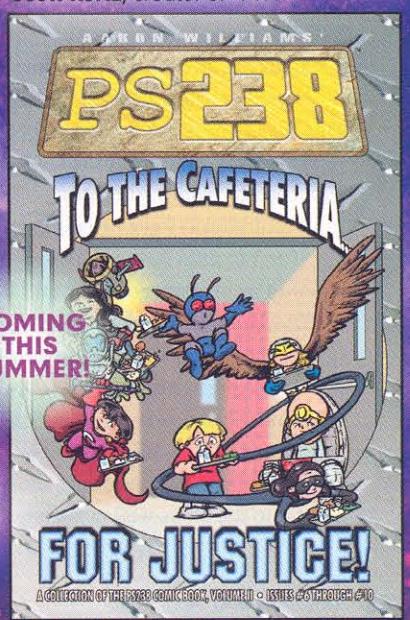
Burch squeezed the trigger and the string twanged. The steel-tipped bolt



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arced through the air and came down right through the nearest of the lights.

The thing exploded in a ball of bright-orange fire.

The light hovering next to the living fireball that exploded shook like a tree in a tornado. It was larger than the other, but the explosion knocked it back. For a moment, it had seemed that the larger light's flame might be snuffed out, but it was back even larger than before. It skittered over to the smaller light, which had reconstituted itself after its explosion, and let loose with an even bigger blast.

The resultant boom snuffed out the smaller spell like a candle. The larger light resumed its original form, but the smaller one never returned.

Mardak slapped the shifter on the back, a wide smile splitting his face. "Excellent job," he said. "Do you think you could do that again?"

Burch shook his head. "That wasn't my kill."

"Do not be so modest. It was your shot that caused the larger creature to kill the smaller."

"That might not have been so wise," Kandler said.

Rislinto looked at Kandler in irritation. "Why not?"

Kandler gestured in a wide circle around the four warriors. There were lights in all directions now, but now their flames leaped higher and crackled louder than before. "I think we made them angry."

"By the Sovereign Host," Rislinto said, "they're all coming this way."

"How many?" Mardak said.

"A dozen?" Kandler said. "More?"

"Any other brilliant ideas?" Burch asked Mardak as he reloaded his crossbow.

The Cyran stood stunned. "It wasn't supposed to happen this way."

"We could run for it," Rislinto said ideally. The big man wrung his beefy hands together as he glanced all around them.

"They're not that slow," said Kandler. "They'd cut us off in any direction."

Mardak drew his sword. "If we must die, we shall go down fighting. For Cyre!" he shouted as he raised his blade into the air. Rislinto halfheartedly shoved his hand into the air as well, painfully aware, it seemed to Kandler, that he hefted no hammer there.

Burch slapped the sword down. "You think you can cut fire with that?"

Mardak brought the blade up under the shifter's throat. "Do you care to test its edge?"

Kandler reached out and pushed the sword away as he stepped between the Cyran and his friend. "If you want to kill yourself, I won't stop you," he said, "but save your blade for them."

"They're getting closer," Rislinto said, his voice getting higher. He clenched his empty hands as he spoke.

Burch let loose another bolt. It slammed into one of the nearest flames. The blaze shot higher into the sky, and the flames nearest to it backed away, but it failed to explode.

"It's waiting until it's close enough," Kandler said.

"I don't think that hurt it a bit," Rislinto said mournfully.

Burch grimaced and nodded as he slung his crossbow across his back again. "We'd better swim for it," the shifter said.

"Have the blasts unbalanced you," Mardak asked incredulously, "or your cowardice?"

Burch spat in Mardak's face, hitting him just below his right eye. Before the Cyran could respond, the shifter charged toward the dead center of the crater. As he went, the ashes rose deeper and deeper until they came up under his chest. He grabbed a deep breath, dove into the fine gray dust, and was gone.

"The coward!" Mardak said, although his tone declared that even he didn't believe his words. "He's willing to end his own life before those spells can consume him?"

Kandler goggled for a moment at the spot where Burch had disappeared. He started off after the shifter.

Before Kandler got three steps, Mardak grabbed him by the shoulder. "Has the shifter's madness afflicted you as well?" he said.

"It's the only way out," Kandler said, shrugged out of Mardak's grasp. "The flames can't follow us into the ash."

"That's crazy," Rislinto said. "Take it from me, you can't breathe ash."

"You heard him," Kandler said. "Treat the ash as if it's water."

"And when you must come up for air?" Mardak said.

"Pray one of those spells isn't sitting right over you."

"I can't do it!" Rislinto said. The fear in the blacksmith's voice almost paralyzed Kandler. "I can't swim!"

Kandler started to laugh, but he realized the big man was serious. He reached out and chucked Rislinto on the shoulder. "I can't think of a better time to learn."

The redheaded man stared into Kandler's eyes for a terrified moment before a soft, half-crazed smile cracked his ash- and sweat-streaked face. "All right," he said softly. "Let's give it a go."

"You coming?" Kandler said to Mardak. The flames danced closer now, and the air grew hotter. Soon the living spells would be close enough to kill them all.

"A Cyran soldier does not run from a fight," Mardak said defiantly.

Kandler shook his head and said flatly, "It'll be a bonfire."

Mardak gripped his sword tighter and glanced around at the flames closing in on them. For a moment, Kandler wondered if the soldier might not be able to swim either. Mardak spotted the Brelander gazing at him and scowled. He swallowed hard and nodded.

The three warriors charged toward the center of the crater. When the ashes were up to their waists, one of the closest spells charged forward across the ashes like a rolling boulder of fire. It must have realized what the men were trying to do, Kandler suspected. Before he could finish the thought, though, the fireball exploded. The impact drove all three men into the ash.

Kandler managed to grab a breath before the gray dust enveloped him. He closed his eyes and pulled himself deeper into the stuff. The ash was looser here in the middle of the crater than it had been along the walls. The winds hadn't packed it down as hard, and it seemed they stirred loose the ashes here. Still, it was like swimming through pudding, and the effort soon wearied Kandler.

After struggling several yards through the muck, Kandler decided to conserve his strength. He stopped moving and waited for the air in his lungs to run out. As he hung there in the ash, he let his feet sink downward until they touched the crater floor.

When the aching in Kandler's chest became too much to bear, he bent back and pointed his face straight up, then pushed down with his legs. As he reached the surface, he could feel the heat of the living fireballs swirling above him. He poked his face through and slowly shook the ash from his exposed flesh, then opened his eyes.

Fire danced in the air over Kandler's head. It seemed that every one of the living fireballs in the crater was there, hunting for a good excuse to explode. Kandler filtered another breath of ashy air in through his teeth and then disappeared beneath the ashes again, fighting a horrible urge to cough.

As Kandler swam through the ashes, he considered his predicament. It was clear he couldn't stay beneath the ashes for long. He was human and would tire, while the living spells could wait for him forever. Sooner or later, he'd make a mistake, come up in the wrong spot, and one of the spells would go off and flash-bake his head.

When that happened, though, there was a chance the creatures would damage each other too, just as they had before. With them packed so tight over the ash-pond, they might even hurt each other enough that their other prey could get away.

Kandler's path, then, was clear. He reached down and drew his sword from its scabbard. His best chance, he thought, was to leap up as high and fast as he could. With luck, he might be able to hit a number of the spells before they blasted him. The more slashes he could get in before they cooked him alive, the better.

The Brelander steeled himself. He didn't want to die. Esprë had already lost both her parents. Was it fair to her to lose her stepfather too? Someone had to do it, though, and do it right. It might as well be him.

Just as Kandler prepared to burst out of the ashes, a series of explosions rocked the entire crater.

The blasts battered Kandler and forced away the layers of ash protecting him, exposing him to the Mournland sky. He felt the flames scorch his hair and flesh. He screamed in fear and pain until the ringing in his ears subsided.

It was over. Kandler stood and peeled open his eyes, the ash mixing with the fluid from the broken blisters on the parts of his face he'd not been able to cover with his hands. He glanced around and spotted a charred body lying next to him, a glowing-hot sword still in its grasp.

Rislinto erupted from where he'd been lying flat on the crater floor, sending even more ash into the air. He sucked in a huge gulp of air and a coughing fit wracked his body before he could utter a word.

Burch popped up at the edge of the ash-pond. The shifter unslung his crossbow as he got to his feet. He scanned the area and spied a small flame fluttering away from the scattered pool of ash. He loosed a bolt at it, and the thing disappeared as if blown out by the wind.

Kandler waded over to the blackened body lying in the center of the ashes, which cradled it where it had fallen, Mardak's red-hot sword still clutched in its hand. He reached out to touch the corpse's crispy flesh, but it was still too hot. The smell was horrible, but somehow appetizing, which turned Kandler's stomach even more.

The Brelander knelt down in the ash next to the corpse and muttered a few final words to it. "Thank you," he said as he thought of his stepdaughter and his wife. "Thank you."

* * *

Late the next day, Priscinta called for Kandler to enter her tent. She wore her dark hair plaited back in a warrior's braid, but her usually hard eyes were swollen with tears. She'd cried many times that day for Mardak, her fallen husband, but these last were for joy.

"He's okay," Priscinta said, the raw emotion in her voice hushed with reverence. "My father's sacred scroll worked."

"Would you have wasted something so precious on me?" Kandler asked. He didn't know if he wanted an answer.

The lady knight smiled at Kandler. "He's asking for you," she said.

Kandler followed Priscinta into the tall, roomy tent that served as her family's home. Among the clutter, in the back of the tent, Mardak lay resting on a wood and canvas cot. In the sunlight streaming in through the tent's open flaps, Kandler could see that Mardak's once-blackened skin was now as pink as a newborn child's.

The Cyran tried to get up to greet his guest, but Kandler waved him back down. "And you called Burch crazy," the Brelander said.

Mardak allowed himself a short laugh. In a scorched whisper, he said, "Did I get them all?"

"Burch shot down the last one. It was next to dead already."

Mardak grinned. Kandler wasn't used to seeing such unadulterated joy on the man's face, but he found that it made him like the Cyran a great deal more. "Then the crater is ours. We have our home."

Kandler nodded. "The first foothold of a new Cyre. You should be proud."

"It was the only way."

Kandler smiled. "We've chosen a name for the outpost."

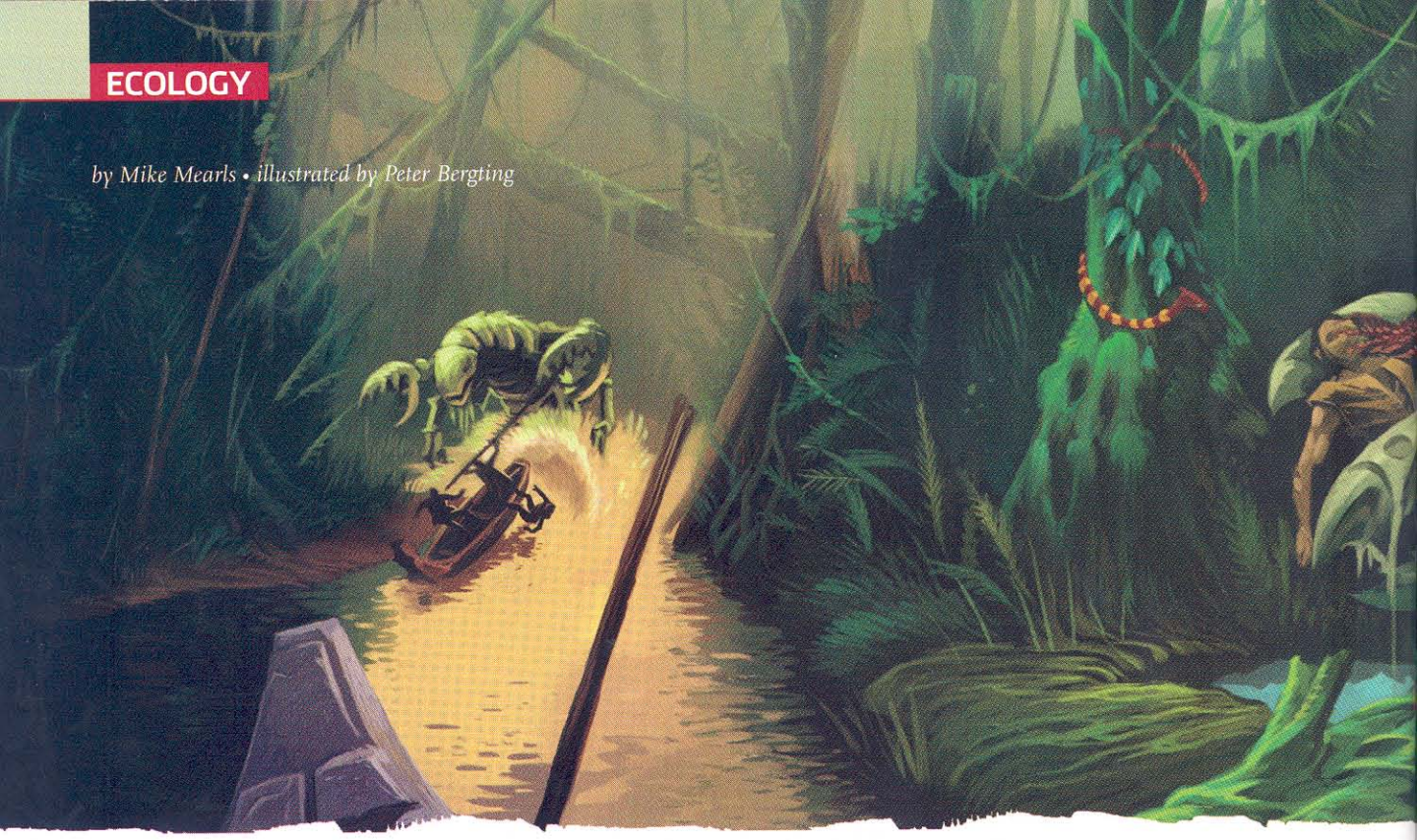
Mardak raised his eyebrows, then winced at the effort. "Who gave you that right?" he asked weakly, his old irritableness not yet strong enough to dampen his good mood.

Kandler put his hands up in mock surrender. "It's called 'Mardakine.'"

With a wide, satisfied smile, the Cyran soldier closed his eyes and said, "It sounds like home."

Matt Forbeck's newest novel, Marked for Death, *continues the adventures of the characters introduced in this story. See A Novel Approach in* Dragon *#329 for more about living fireballs, and make sure to pick up* Marked for Death *for more adventure in* Eberron!

by Mike Mearls • illustrated by Peter Bergting



THE ECOLOGY OF THE CHUUL

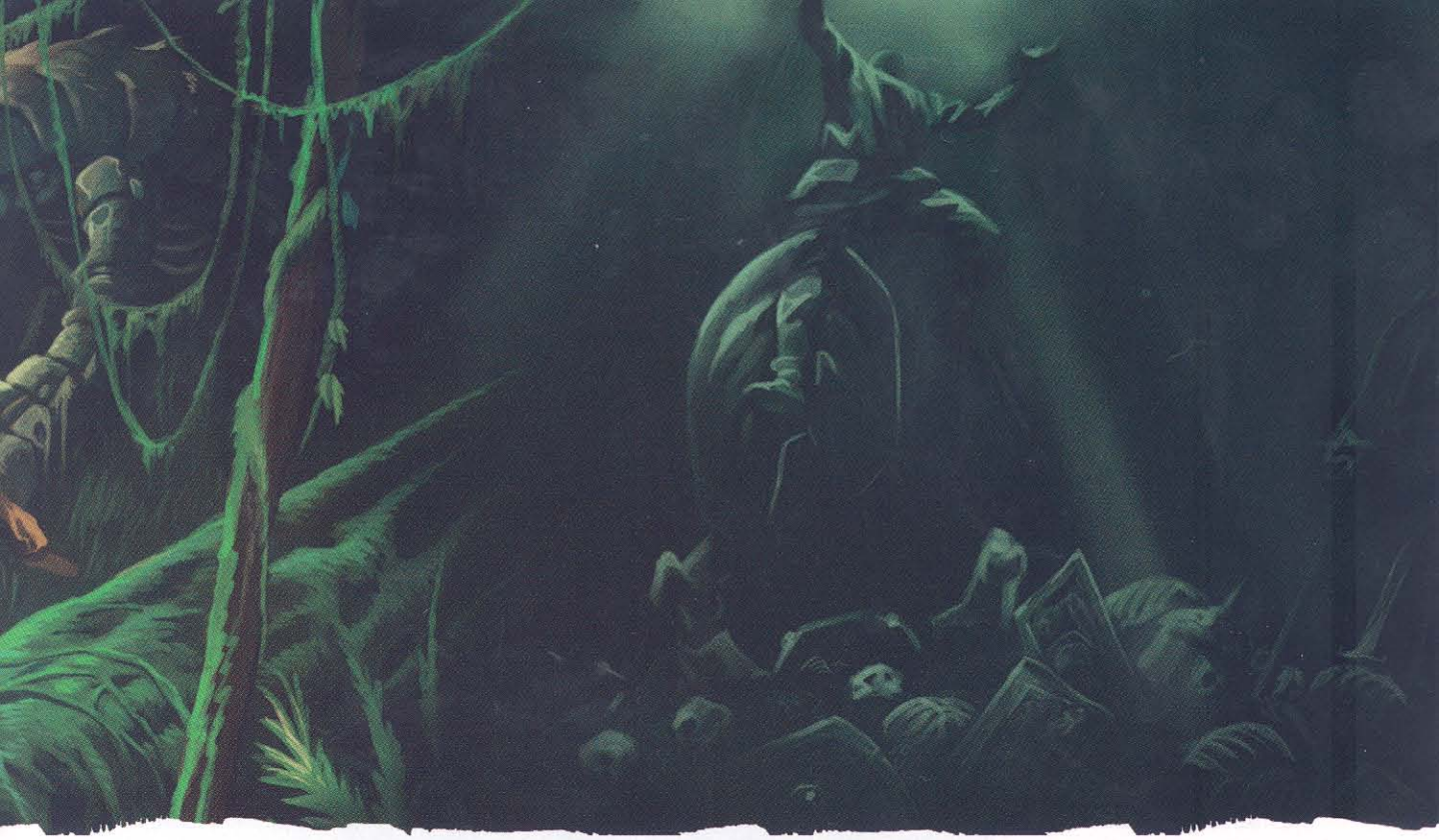
With crushing claws and crippling tentacles, one creature has torn itself a niche among the fetid waters of the land's most deadly wildernesses. Although the vicious chuul has only recently appeared in the lands of civilized races, already it is renowned as one of the world's deadliest swamp predators. With its monstrous pincers, glistening carapace, and paralytic tentacles, the chuul is a threat to even the most skilled warrior. While physically powerful, a chuul's greatest advantage over other swamp dwellers is its keen mind. Its hulking body belies an intellect that matches the average human's and surpasses those of many of its swamp-lurking competitors.

History of Chuuls

The first chuuls appeared within the world's swamps merely a few dozen years ago. Most sages assume that, given their strange physical mixture of insectile, reptilian, and crustacean traits, they are the result of a madman's experiments. After all, many of the world's most terrible monsters arose from arcane tampering with the secret processes of life. None can say where chuuls first arose, but the methods by which they spread paint them as an insidious, cunning enemy.

Six years ago, an expedition under the command of the elf wizard Tarthalas Driishan set sail for the endless waves beyond the horizon. Tarthalas had uncovered the ancient library of the archmage Kleptis. The archmage's journals described a tropical island far from established trade routes and major currents. According to the books, this place was once the abode of a powerful mage who had gathered great material and arcane wealth. Supposedly, the world had ignored him until he unleashed a strange, terrible army of aberrations to conquer nearby lands. When he revealed himself as a threat, the nearby civilized nations banded together to destroy him.

The journal detailed the island's location, but the notes ended with the entry that described Kleptis's preparations for the ocean journey. Tarthalas assumed that the archmage had failed to reach his destination or had died there. In his



hubris, Tarthalas believed that with his skills and magic he could succeed where Kleptis had failed. Gathering his resources, Tarthalas organized a fleet of three ships to venture out to the island and recover its treasures.

When Tarthalas and his men arrived at the island, they soon learned why Kleptis never returned. The place was overrun with a bewildering array of strange and deadly monsters. Its ecosystem resembled a continuous, bloodthirsty war between predatory creatures. Tribes of primitive mind flayers attacked his crew by night, killing scores of sailors. Three-armed, brutish giants assaulted the ships during the day, while expeditions into the jungles encountered ettercaps, otyughs, gibbering mouthers, and a variety of previously unknown monstrosities. Howling lizardfolk assaulted the sailors with barbed javelins and poisoned darts. Plants lashed out at the explorers, choking them to death in powerful vines or drowning them in murky pools. The monstrous hordes destroyed two of Tarthalas's ships and slaughtered their crews. When a captured and magically dominated lizardfolk revealed nothing about the ruins Tarthalas came searching for, he and the survivors began preparing for the voyage home.

CHUUL KNOWLEDGE

The following table shows the result of Knowledge (dungeoneering) checks related to chuuls. Those who live near swamps or plumb the Underdark's alien depths might know this information.

Knowledge (dungeoneering)

DC	Result
10	Chuuls are amphibious creatures that combine the most deadly aspects of crustaceans, insects, and snakes.
15	Chuuls attack from ambush whenever possible. A chuul can crush a man to death with its claws if it manages to grab hold of its prey.
20	Chuuls are surprisingly intelligent and might set a variety of traps for their prey. They often create simple underwater lairs and gather treasure and other trinkets there.
25	A chuul's tentacles might seem puny, but they are coated with a paralytic venom. Chuuls possess a particular hatred of all humanoid creatures.
30	Despite their size, chuuls have short arms and can't reach especially far. Chuuls sometimes put aside their hatred of humanoids to barter for goods and information, using the treasures of previous victims in trade.

What the lizardfolk's gibbering did reveal was that the creatures of the island had fought and died for centuries. The lizardfolk spoke of a mighty god who had once ruled the island. One day a horde of monsters that walked upon the water beached themselves and unleashed a torrent of smaller beasts that killed the god and reduced his temple to dust. It spoke of beings called the enforcers, hulking warriors that once defended the god but had walked across the sea on some unknown quest before the god's demise. Since that time, the island had fallen into chaos as the god's progeny, freed of his calming influence, battled for supremacy. Every year, new species arose to fight for dominance, either dying at their enemies' jaws or carving out a link in the food chain. The entire ecosystem seemed to be focused on producing the deadliest creatures imaginable in an evolutionary process

gone haywire. Once, the creatures had struggled for the god's amusement and favor. Now, they battled to survive.

On the night before Tarthalas's departure, the primitive mind flayers made their final assault and slew the wizard. During the fighting, the sailors failed to notice three large, clawed beasts that slipped pulsing egg sacs through a porthole into an empty cabin. In the morning, relieved that they had survived, the remaining sailors cast off for home. None would live to see their destination. The newborn chuuls picked off the crewmen one by one, carefully pacing their attacks to satisfy their hunger while leaving enough survivors to guide the ship to its destination. After slaying the last sailor, the chuuls leapt overboard in sight of land and swam to their new homeland.

Some of the forgotten god's enforcers had never left the island, and now they had a chance to escape it. Driven onward by their creator's final orders to battle against all humanoids, they were determined to avenge their ancient, bitter defeat.



Physiology of Chuuls

The individual organs and parts of a chuul bear a resemblance to those found in other organisms, but the collective whole they form is utterly unique. The chuul's outer shell and massive claws give it an outward resemblance to a crustacean, but its rear legs and exoskeleton mark it as a gigantic insect. Stranger still, dissection reveals that the foremost sections of its body resemble a serpent. With its thick carapace removed, a chuul looks like the upper half of a tentacled serpent fused with the hindquarters of a giant water bug. A closer inspection supports a literal interpretation of this initial appearance. Through some trick of evolution or arcane experimentation, a chuul is the union of two creatures that shared such a close symbiotic bond that they eventually melded into a single species.

The divide between the chuul's brutish appearance and its surprisingly keen intellect traces back to this symbiotic link. Its basic body form derives from a monstrous animal that fused qualities of crustaceans and insects. This simple creature lacked the chuul's intellect and its paralytic tentacles. The second half of this duo was a small, snakelike aberration that hunted by paralyzing its prey, burrowing into its brain, and slowly feeding as it controlled its victim's body like a puppet.

On the hellish island that spawned the chuul, these two creatures adopted a close relationship, with the serpentine puppet masters preferring to victimize the crustacean-insect creatures. Over centuries of artificially accelerated evolution and magical intervention, the chuul's predecessors merged into one species.

Chuuls are relatively new to ecosystems beyond their home island. That they have spread so quickly across the world, and even into the planes, illustrates the potent combination of their keen minds and mighty bodies. Worst of all, most of the chuuls that dwell near civilization are relatively young. Who can say what horrors await the world as chuuls grow old and develop into growth phases beyond adulthood?

Psychology and Culture of Chuuls

In the hyper-competitive environment that spawned the first chuuls, their young had little time to learn the tricks and tactics needed to compete with stronger, faster, and deadlier creatures. Over time, chuuls evolved a mechanism that allowed them to pass on some knowledge from one generation to the next. A newborn chuul possesses a portion of the hunting knowledge its parents accumulated, retained as vague images and sense memories. While many of the less important details fade, some chuuls possess thoughts that trace back generations, but more as a form of heightened instinct than as actual memories. This ancestral instinct shapes much of a chuul's actions and attitudes regarding other races.

Chuuls see themselves as locked in a war against the humanoid creatures of the strange new lands they inhabit. In the misty past of their race, they were formed to fight against all outsiders. This siege mentality has remained with them. To the chuuls, anything that walks on two legs and has hands is a mortal enemy. After all, men, elves, lizardfolk, and orcs inevitably dominate the regions they settle. To chuuls, this is a sure sign that humanoids are their primary competitors. Thus, they harbor a deep, racial hatred

CHUUL LAIRS

Chuuls most commonly lair in natural aquatic caverns, sunken ships, sewer tunnels, or underwater complexes created to their own alien specifications. While the drowned caves and other preformed structures they inhabit might take a variety of shapes, their river bottom homes—usually formed of fallen branches, swamp mud, and various debris—have a relatively uniform layout.

In such a chuul-constructed lair, an underwater entrance leads into the first of several roughly circular chambers. This entrance room often holds a makeshift door made from an uprooted tree stump or other barrier that creatures weaker than a chuul might have trouble moving (requiring at least a DC 15 Strength check to move aside). Past this barrier lies the chuul's all-purpose sleeping and eating chamber, decorated with the humanoid bones of past meals. If any chamber in the lair is even partially filled with air it's likely to be this main room, allowing a chuul to house a slave or the rare prisoner here. A third circular space commonly branches off from this central chamber, holding the chuul's trophies from previous ambushes and raids. While a chuul lair is likely to be at least this simple, one housing a pair or pack of chuuls is likely to be significantly larger and more complex, with every resident chuul having its own trophy room.

CHUUL TROPHIES

All chuuls harbor a notorious hatred of humanoid races, one they openly express in their lairs. Within these grim aquatic halls and in specialized trophy rooms, chuuls exhibit the bones and treasures of humanoids they've defeated. While an opponent's most valuable possessions are often traded away, particularly impressive pieces are sometimes hoarded or worked into totems and fetishes consisting of the rest of the victim's remains. Chuuls commonly determine status by which chuul possesses the greatest number of or most impressive trophies, although all an ambitious or covetous chuul must do to advance is slay another chuul and claim its best trophies as its own.

d10	Example Chuul Trophies
1	A totem of six halfling skulls impaled upon a lizardfolk spear.
2	An entire dwarven skeleton, purposefully shattered then reassembled.
3	A humanoid spine fashioned into a necklace with a number of finger bone bangles.
4	An elven skull randomly punctured by seven arrows of elven make.
5	A pouch filled with humanoid teeth of wildly varying sizes.
6	The skull of a giant crocodile with lizardfolk claws in place of teeth.
7	A stack of human hands and snake meat stacked upon a rapier like a shish kebob.
8	The dismembered arm and claw of another chuul.
9	A finely stitched quiver crammed with elven rib bones.
10	A number of humanoid femurs arranged in a sunburst pattern with a black dragon skull at the center.

of such creatures and delight in tormenting and slaying them whenever they have the opportunity.

Even the most simple humanoid activities in an area a chuul considers its territory are sure to attract its murderous scorn. A caravan bound through a swampy region might find that its sentinels disappear one by one over the course of several nights, dragged off by an unseen opponent smart enough to avoid a large scale confrontation. Hiding amid the rampant vegetation, a chuul might then attack supply wagons, knocking them over and destroying the food and water stored within. Next it strikes at the horses, mules, and other beasts of burden. Finally, when the surviving guards and merchants teeter on the verge of starvation, when the endless panicked hours of marching through deep mud and foul water have drained their strength, the chuul closes in for the kill. To a chuul, this carefully planned assault is little more than a game of cat and mouse.

While chuuls hate all humanoids, they sometimes work with beholders and mind flayers. Those races typically use their magical abilities to dominate their chuul servants, but sometimes they form tenuous alliances. A chuul's racial memories tell it that mind flayers and beholders are creatures native to its race's home island and might be worked with to defeat particularly dangerous enemies.

Chuuls have also been known to sometimes put aside their hatred of humanoids to work against greater threats. While a chuul never willingly serves a humanoid creature, it might approach such creatures to benefit itself. Understanding that even the most monstrous humanoid races find their forms just as disgusting as they find the humanoid shape, chuuls sometimes work with such races via a messenger or slave. Such a servant is most often a member of a humanoid race less intelligent than the chuul (usually a kobold, goblin, troglodyte, or lizardfolk) and is pressed into its service either by the promise of wealth—taken from the chuul's previous victims—or violence. Once forced into a chuul's employ, such a servant trades for information or goods its master's form would prevent it from creating itself—which is a great deal, considering that a chuul's massive claws prevent the fine manipulation of small or delicate objects. In this manner chuuls become aware of much happening within the areas they inhabit and sometimes gain the materials needed to make surprisingly complex traps.

The chuuls' racial memory also makes them a dangerous threat, for they remember glimpses of their homeland and wish to extend that perfect environment to the mainland. Some chuuls even remember their creator, and many wish to help restore his



legacy. If their plans come to fruition, they could import an entire malevolent ecosystem that could push aside the native plants and animals. Thus, a chuul might gather treasure and items not merely as keepsakes or out of greed, but to help secretly fund more expeditions to its native lands. A chuul might spare a traveler, offering him a bribe in return for such service. Other chuuls leave slave-created maps to their homelands in treasure caches beside busy roads for travelers to uncover.

Vs. Chuuls

Malicious and devious in a way no crocodile or giant serpent could be, chuuls are some of the deadliest threats of the swamp. Even when outside its favored environment, a chuul's host of natural weapons and abilities makes it a fearful combatant.

Alien Physiology: Unnatural abominations warped by magic and an afflicted environment, chuuls do not possess a physiology like any natural creature. As such, poisons and similar toxins do not affect chuuls, and those relying on such solutions when fighting these aberrations might be in store for a fatal surprise.

Beware of the Water: In stagnant ponds and swampy waterways, Chuuls often lurk just below the surface, waiting for prey to pass nearby. Even the dark depths below the water's surface doesn't hinder a hunting chuul, as its darkvision allows it to see nearly as well as it does on the surface. Thus, those passing through areas potentially home to these predators should remain watchful for patiently prepared ambushes from even the most placid pool.

Keep Away: Since chuuls are one of the few Large creatures that lack reach, longspears and ranged weapons can keep them at bay. These armaments form a good combination with a mobile strategy, keeping the chuul at a safe distance while opponents maneuver around it. Other basic tactics like using ranged weapons and preparing the spell *remove paralysis* should also help keep one out of a chuul's reach.

Cowardice: Despite all their cunning and strength, chuuls universally possess low Charisma scores. Such a flaw most commonly manifests as intense cowardice. As such, chuuls are easily scared off or unnerved when faced with larger or obviously more powerful creatures or groups.

Slow Eater: When fighting chuuls, remember that they must use a move action to transfer a victim from their claws to their tentacles. Thus, if one can keep a chuul moving it cannot make full use of its abilities.

Aberrant Intelligence: Adventurers cannot forget that chuuls are highly intelligent predators and use tactics that expose a party's weaknesses. A chuul might rush for the party's sorcerer or wizard for an easy meal, ignoring heavily armored PCs in favor of a softer target. Unlike animals and brutish aberrations, the chuul is smart enough to maximize its abilities.

Given their hatred of humanoid life, chuuls rarely parley. They can speak Common, but if they stop to talk, one can count on a trick or an offer intended to cause havoc. When a chuul truly does wish to parley, it most commonly uses a servant as a mouthpiece.

Adventures seeking unparalleled information about an area might be able to barter with a chuul or its servant, offering food and information of their own in return. However, a chuul will attempt to unbalance even a situation such as this to its favor, so negotiators should be exceptionally wary.

OUT OF THE WADING POOL



The chuul was newly created for the third edition *Monster Manual*, making it a member of D&D's monstrous family for only four years. It also appears as a rare figure in the recent *Aberrations Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures* set. Being one of the few mid-level aquatic creatures, chuuls fill a useful niche and have appeared in numerous *Dungeon* adventures, including "Tammeraut's Fate" (in #106), "Strike on the Rabid Dawn" (in #111), and "The Styes" (in #121 this month). For more on chuuls, check out *Lords of Madness*, also releasing this month.



by Oliver Diaz and Robert J. Hahn • illustrated by Jeff Carlisle

TOOLS OF THE ASSASSIN

A trained assassin masters the arts of stealth, combat, and arcane magic. He blends magic with his natural talents, becoming a more efficient and deadly killer. His knowledge of arcane magic makes the assassin keenly aware of its potential, both as a weapon and a means to track his prey. Thus, he seeks items of power to increase his own potency, potentially even traveling the path of the wizard or sorcerer for a time to increase his arcane deadliness.

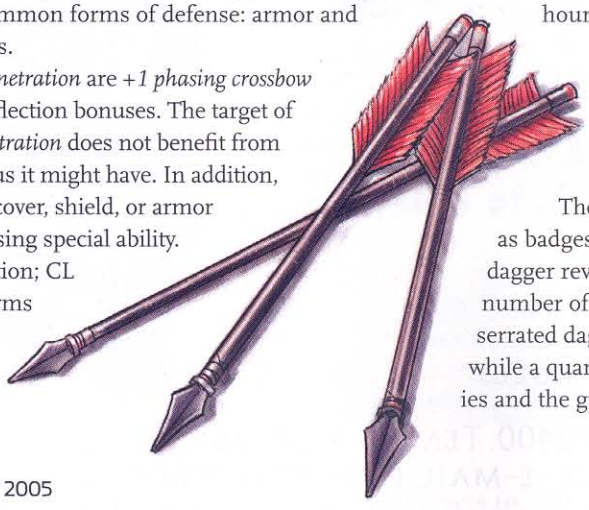
Insidious magic implements exist for those of assassin ilk. They are difficult to acquire and their deadly nature requires a practiced hand to employ them effectively. These items appear on lists of outlawed goods throughout the known kingdoms, possession earning imprisonment and, in some cases, death.

BOLTS OF ARCANE PENETRATION

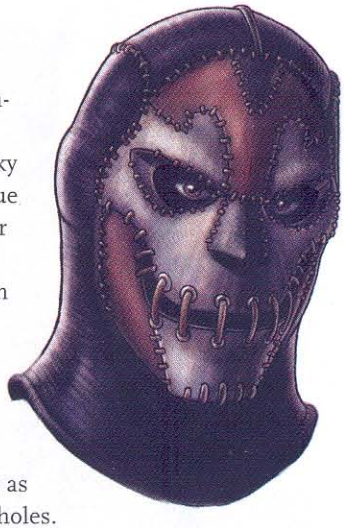
Killing nobles and wizards tends to be harder than one would expect. Most carry a variety of protective devices to defend against attacks from both mundane and magical sources. *Bolts of arcane penetration* seek to punch through two of the most common forms of defense: armor and magical protections.

Bolts of arcane penetration are *+1 phasing crossbow bolts* that ignore deflection bonuses. The target of a *bolt of arcane penetration* does not benefit from any deflection bonus it might have. In addition, the target loses its cover, shield, or armor bonus, per the phasing special ability.

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *blink;* Price 650 gp; Weight —.



MASK OF THE REAPER



Most assassins desire anonymity and few work without a mask. Those innocents unlucky enough to see an assassin's true face often find daggers in their backs soon after. The *mask of the reaper* originally came from the mind of an assassin with a taste for the theatrical. He desired more than his victims' death. He wanted their fear.

A *mask of the reaper* appears as a grey knit mask with two eyeholes. When worn, a *mask of the reaper* grants a gaze attack with a range of 30 feet. Any creature within range must make a DC 14 Will save or see in the wearer a manifestation of its worst fear, affecting the creature as the *cause fear* spell. The mask cannot affect a creature more than once in a 24-hour period, whether the target fails its save or not.

Moderate illusion; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, *cause fear;* Price 30,000 gp; Weight —.

QUIET DAGGER

The Guild of the Silent Scream uses *quiet daggers* as badges of membership. The shape and design of a dagger reveals the wielder's rank, skills, specialties, and number of successful kills. For instance, a journeyman's serrated dagger with five notches might indicate five kills, while a quartz pommel specifies his mastery of arcane studies and the green-tinged blade his expertise with poison.

CURSED ITEMS, PORTABLE TRAPS

Ever wonder who bothers spending time and gold creating all those cursed magic items? Consider how easily a high-ranking cleric would fall victim to a *scarab of death* left surreptitiously by a wily assassin. Perhaps the assassin poses as a traveling lord and gifts a local duke with *armor of arrow attraction,* afterward insinuating himself upon the duke to join him on a hunt. Cursed items are portable traps, always debilitating... often deadly.

NEW WEAPON SPECIAL ABILITIES

Over the years, assassins have commissioned or discovered new ways of making their weapons more deadly and effective. Two recently created special abilities are phasing and silent strike, described here. Two of the items in this article use these special abilities.

PHASING

This special ability only applies to ammunition. Phasing ammunition allows the wielder to ignore a single solid obstacle no thicker than 5 feet. A phasing arrow can be shot through a glass window, stone rampart, or even an adamantine breastplate. When using phasing ammunition ignore cover, then shield, then armor of the target, in that order (you only get one). Once one form of bonus has been ignored, the rest apply normally. Natural armor, deflection, and dodge bonuses remain unaffected by phasing ammunition.

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *blink;* Price +2 bonus.

SILENT STRIKE

Any creature struck by a silent strike weapon must make a DC 15 Will save or be silenced, as per the spell *silence,* for 4 rounds. Multiple hits from a silent strike weapon reset the duration of the silence but do not otherwise stack.

Faint illusion; CL 3rd; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *silence;* Price +1 bonus.



Quiet daggers come in three forms: apprentice, journeyman, and master. An apprentice acquires his dagger when he takes his first level in the assassin prestige class. He reaches the rank of journeyman at 5th level and master at 9th.

An apprentice's *quiet dagger* is a *+1 silent strike dagger* that grants its wielder a +5 competence bonus on Move Silently checks when held.

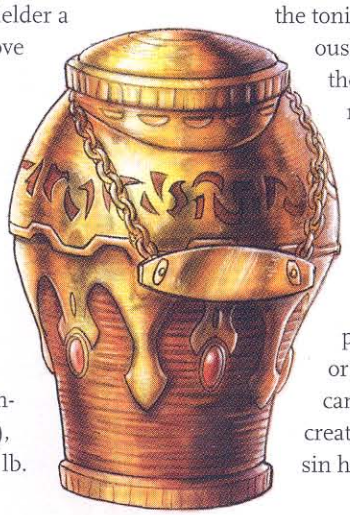
A journeyman's *quiet dagger* is a *+2 silent strike dagger* that grants it wielder a +5 competence bonus on Move Silently checks when held. It also functions as a *lesser silent metamagic rod.*

A master's *quiet dagger* is a *+3 silent strike dagger* that grants its wielder a +5 competence bonus on Move Silently checks when held, functions as a *lesser silent metamagic rod,* and grants its wielder SR 14.

Faint or moderate illusion; CL 3rd (apprentice), CL 6th (journeyman), CL 9th (master); Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *silence, dispel magic* (master dagger only); Price 10,800 gp (apprentice), 25,300 gp (journeyman), 59,300 gp (master); Weight 1 lb.

REQUIEM JAR

This tonic of black sludge is typically encased in a barrel-shaped bronze receptacle, around which hangs a chain with a blank plaque. To use this tonic, it must be poured into a corpse's mouth. From there it magically works its way through the body, causing the corpse to deteriorate at an incredible rate. In 1 round all remnants of the corpse's flesh and blood dissolve into dust. In 2 rounds the creature's bones or exoskeleton completely crumble and in 3 rounds the resulting dust magically whirls up and flies into the empty container formerly housing the tonic. On the previously blank plaque the creature's name magically appears. This magical process ensures three things: the creature's remains are obfuscated from searching parties, a *raise dead* or *resurrection* spell cannot revive the dead creature, and the assassin has portable proof of the victim's demise. The remains in the jar are sufficient for a *resurrection* spell should they be emptied out.



Living creatures that drink the fluid within a *requiem jar* are not affected by its magic, but are sickened for 1 hour.

Faint evocation; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *disintigrate;* Price 3,300 gp; Weight —.

RING OF STALKING

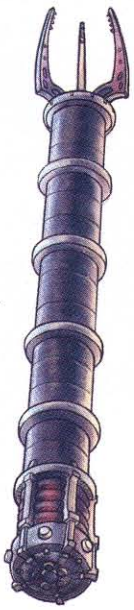
This delicate silver band has a single black diamond set on its surface. To activate the ring, the wearer must speak a command word and then the name of a creature known to the user into the stone. If the wearer concentrates on the creature and holds his hand aloft, the ring's gem glows when held in the direction of the named creature. There is no limit to the ring's range except that the target must be on the same plane as the wearer. When the wearer is within 120 feet of the target the ring glows continuously and grows



warm to the touch. At that point, the proximity of the target is too close to reveal its exact direction.Changing the ring's target is a full-round action.

Strong divination; CL 13th; Forge Ring, *greater scrying, locate creature;* Price 56,000 gp; Weight —.

ROD OF DEADLY FUNCTION



A dark variation of the *rod of lordly might*, this slim black rod has a series of studs along its base. Its design is cruel and utilitarian, like a torture device version of a traditional *rod of lordly might*. The *rod of deadly function* has numerous magical and mundane functions activated either by concentrating or by pressing one of the studs along the base

The following spell-like functions of the rod can each be used once per day.

- *Deep slumber* upon touch, if the wielder so commands (Will DC 14 negates). The wielder must choose to use this power and then succeed on a melee touch attack to activate the power. If the attack fails, the effect is lost.
- *True strike.*
- Deal 2d4 hit points of damage to an opponent on a successful touch attack (Will DC 17 half) and cure the wielder of a like amount of damage. The wielder must choose to use this power before attacking, as with *deep slumber*. If the attack fails, the effect is lost.

The following weapon functions of the rod have no limit on the number of times they can be employed.

- In its normal form, the rod can be used as a *+1 light mace.*
- Pressing button 1 turns the rod into a *+1 keen rapier.*
- Pressing button 2 turns the rod into a *+2 returning throwing axe.*
- Pressing button 3 causes a steel-chain whip to form that acts as a *+3 whip dagger* (page 7 of the *Arms and Equipment Guide*).
- Pressing button 4 causes the rod to extend various lockpicking tools which function as a set of masterwork lockpicks. The tools it creates include picks, files, manual drills, spikes, levers, and wrenches.

Strong divination, enchantment, evocation, and transmutation; CL 18th; Craft Rod, Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *deep slumber, true strike;* Price 60,000 gp; Weight 5 lb.

GOGGLES OF SCRUTINY

Degen Sheve epitomized the artistry of dealing death. Known for his outrageous prices and impeccable service, Degen became a legend. All that changed after he was cursed by a wizard relative of one of his marks. The curse left him nearly blind. Fearing the end of his assassin career, Degen turned his attention to magical research, seeking a cure for his ailment. Ten years later, after having the curse partially lifted, he crafted a pair of goggles that counteracted the remainder of the wizard's curse, allowing Degen to take revenge and regain his place in his guild.



Goggles of scrutiny grant their wearer a +2 bonus on all Search and Spot checks. In addition, any creature with the death attack special ability need only study a potential victim for 2 rounds instead of 3.

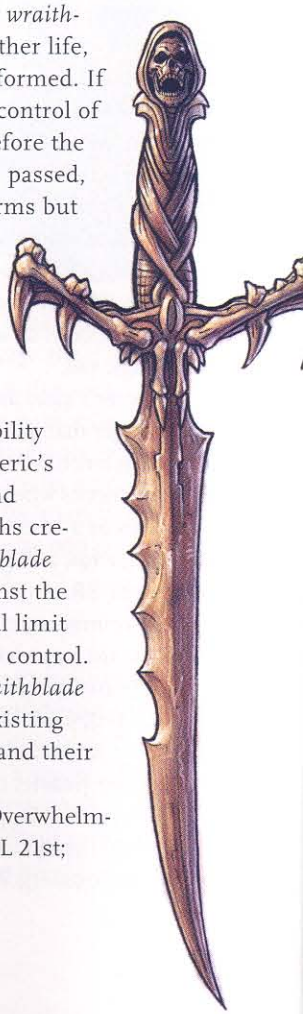
Strong divination; CL 12th; Craft Wondrous Item, *clairaudience/clairvoyance;* Price 12,000 gp; Weight —.

WRAITHBLADE

This slender, wicked dagger seems carved from a single unclean bone shard. The yellowed surface is damp and pinkish in places, as if freshly drawn from a newly fallen corpse.

Legends speak of the creation of the *wraithblade* by the infamous assassin Szeptem Mor, credited with the slayings of countless victims, including no fewer than seven kings and two high priests of Pelor. The relentless killer gained his infamy from his slow, painful killings, making him a favorite for grudge assassinations.

The *wraithblade* is a *+4 ghost touch dagger* with other, more harrowing powers. Any living target struck by the *wraithblade* must succeed at a DC 16 Fortitude save or suffer 1d6 points of Constitution damage. The soul of any creature killed by the *wraithblade* becomes a thrall of the blade's wielder and serves him as a wraith. It takes 1 minute (10 rounds) for the soul to manifest as a wraith under the absolute control of the *wraithblade's* wielder. A creature whose soul is made into a wraith in this manner cannot be brought back from the dead until the wraith is destroyed. The number of wraiths created in this way can never exceed one plus the user's Charisma modifier (minimum of one wraith). If the maximum number of wraiths already exist and the *wraithblade* claims another life, no new wraith is formed. If the wielder loses control of the *wraithblade* before the entire minute has passed, the wraith still forms but it immediately attacks the *wraithblade's* wielder. If the wielder can control undead through a class ability (such as an evil cleric's ability to command undead) the wraiths created by the *wraithblade* do not count against the character's normal limit of undead he may control. Whenever the *wraithblade* changes hands, existing wraiths dissipate and their souls find rest.



Minor artifact; Overwhelming necromancy; CL 21st; Weight 1 lb.

by Mike Mearls • illustrated by Chuck Lukacs



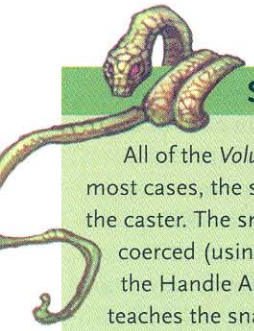
VOLUME VENEFICUS

Few works of magical lore so inspire both covetousness and dread as the deadly *Volume Veneficus*. Unlike any other magical writing, the spells that encompass this work are scribed upon the scales of living snakes, each one's colorful scales magically altered into mystic runes. According to yuan-ti legend, these powerful spells were gifts from their terrible god Merrshaulk, a reward to those yuan-ti who bred the mightiest and deadliest serpents. While the original snakes have long since been lost, once a generation an egg laid by a particularly favored yuan-ti temple leader hatches as a nest of fully grown serpents bearing the *Volume Veneficus*. Thus, this lore has passed from one generation of yuan-ti to the next.

On rare occasions, a new snake appears bearing the *Volume Veneficus's* mystic patterns or additions to it. Great omens and portents signal this event to the yuan-ti, and sometimes their cruel god places such a great boon within the territories of other sentient creatures. The yuan-ti invariably launch a dark crusade to reclaim what they see as their birthright, and in so doing fill Merrshaulk's thirst for conquest and destruction.

Crushing Coils

Conjuration (Teleportation)
Level: Drd 3, Sor/Wiz 4
Components: V, S, F
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level), see text
Effect: One snake teleported to constrict target
Duration: 1 round/level
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No



SERPENTINE FOCI

All of the *Volume Veneficus's* spells use at least one live snake as a focus. In most cases, the spells' magic alters the snake or somehow combines it with the caster. The snake used as a focus must be the caster's familiar, magically coerced (using a spell such as *charm animal* or *hypnotism*), or trained using the Handle Animal skill (this training is the equivalent of a single trick that teaches the snake how to help complete a spell). Dead serpents or material representations do not meet the requirements of these spells.

A snake used as a focus retains its normal statistics unless otherwise noted. Should a snake used as a focus of one of these spells die, the spell immediately ends. When the spell ends the snake returns to normal. You can only use snakes with the animal type to cast these spells. Most commonly this means using the snakes listed on pages 279–281 of the *Monster Manual*, although those presented on pages 83–87 of the FORGOTTEN REALMS accessory *Serpent Kingdoms* might be welcome additions. A snake used in casting one of these spells cannot be more than one size larger than you, and it cannot have more hit dice than your caster level.

You teleport the snake that serves as this spell's focus around an opponent, allowing the serpent to crush the creature within its grasp. The snake can be teleported to any space within the spell's range and moves to attack the nearest opponent. If it is teleported into another creature's space it may immediately initiate a grapple that does not provoke an attack of opportunity. If the snake succeeds at this grapple check it establishes a hold and can immediately constrict. If the snake fails to grapple the target it enters an empty space adjacent to the target creature and attacks every round on your initiative in an attempt to use its improved grapple ability. The snake gains a bonus on its grapple check and its constriction damage equal to half your caster level. The snake gains no bonus on its attack roll or bite damage, although it does gain DR 10/magic for the duration of the spell.

As a move action, you can call the snake back to you, causing it to move at its full speed to the closet adjacent square to you. Once it has returned, you can teleport the snake elsewhere or against a different target as a standard action provided that the spell's duration has not yet expired. Once the spell expires you can no longer teleport the focus snake, and it loses its bonuses on grapple checks and constriction damage as well as its damage reduction.

Focus: A constrictor snake that is no more than one size category larger than you.

FANG BLADE

Transmutation
Level: Clr 4, Drd 3, Rgr 3, Sor/Wiz 4
Components: V, S, F
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Touch
Effect: Transforms snake into weapon
Duration: 1 minute/level (D)
Saving Throw: See text
Spell Resistance: No

You transform the snake that serves as the focus of this spell into a steel blade. The snake's scales glisten with a metallic sheen and the weapon's point consists of the snake's fanged maw. This weapon is a longsword appropriate to your size. You are automatically proficient with this weapon, as the snake moves and weaves to aid you in handling it. In addition to normal longsword damage, the fang blade injects any poison it delivers with its bite with a successful strike. If the snake is non-poisonous, the blade does not deliver any venom.

Only you can wield a *fang blade*. If anyone else attempts to wield it, the blade snaps at him with its bite attack at the beginning of each of his turns. This attack uses the statistics of the snake that served as the spell's focus. At the end of the spell's duration, the snake returns to normal. If anyone attempts to sunder the weapon, it has hardness 8 and hit points equal to the snake's total at the time of the spell's casting.

Focus: A live snake of any type that is no more than one size category larger than you.

MERRSHAULK'S KISS

Enchantment
Level: Clr 4, Drd 3
Components: V, S, F
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Touch
Target: Up to one snake per two levels, no two of which can be more than 30 ft. apart
Duration: 1 min./level
Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)
Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

You call upon the venomous might of Merrshaulk to bless and enhance a number of living snakes. This spell only affects creatures with the animal type. Yuan-ti and other snakelike creatures are not valid targets.

Snakes affected by this spell gain a number of bonuses. Snakes with a poison special attack recieve a +2 morale bonus to their poison's DC. Snakes with the constrict special attack gain a +2 morale bonus on all grapple checks. In addition, all snakes targeted by this spell gain a +1 morale bonus on attack rolls, saves, and skill checks.

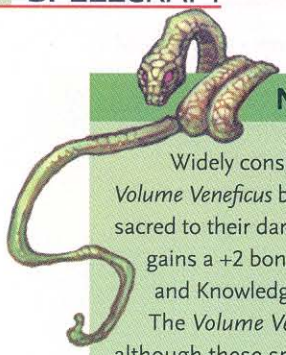
Focus: A live snake.

SERPENT STORM

Evocation
Level: Clr 6, Drd 5
Components: V, S, F
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Area: 20-ft.-radius spread
Duration: 1 round/level (D)
Saving Throw: See Text
Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell causes the affected area to fill with a storm of deadly snakes that rain from above and form a dense carpet upon the ground.

Anyone inside the area takes 1d6 points of damage per two levels of the caster from dozens of bites and



NEW SPELLS OF THE VOLUME VENEFICUS

Widely considered one of the most holy texts of Merrshaulk's church, the *Volume Veneficus* bears not just spells favored by the yaun-ti, but words of power sacred to their dark god. Any creature bearing this serpentine collection of spells gains a +2 bonus on all Knowledge (nature) checks as they pertain to yaun-ti and Knowledge (religion) checks concerning Merrshaulk's worship.

The *Volume Veneficus* commonly covers the scales of three Medium vipers, although these spells have been known to appear upon both larger and different types of serpents throughout history. These snakes become docile in the hands of any yuan-ti spellcaster, allowing such bearers to prepare the spells covering them. Should any other creature attempt to handle them, the snakes attack ferociously and can only be studied after they are slain or magically calmed (Handle Animal attempts always fail).

Although it is possible, scribing the *Volume Veneficus* into a standard spellbook is considered a heresy punishable by death among the yuan-ti. However, that doesn't stop the scholars of other races from doing so. A textual copy of the *Volume Veneficus*, holding only the new wizard spells presented here, is worth 1,700 gp, although a seller aware of such a tome's extreme rarity might sell it for triple the price. Should the yuan-ti hear of such of a compilation, they spare no length in hunting down and torturously murdering all parties even tagentially connected to the heretical text.

Cleric Spells

2nd-Level Cleric Spells

Venomous Volley: Cone of fangs damages and weakens targets.

3rd-Level Cleric Spells

Snake Shield: Serpentine force surrounds you and protects you from attack.

4th-Level Cleric Spells

Fang Blade: Transforms a snake into a sword that can bite and poison targets.

Mershaulk's Kiss: Enhances a number of living snakes.

6th-Level Cleric Spells

Serpent Storm: Creates a hail of deadly serpents that bite and poison everyone in the area.

Druid Spells

2nd-Level Druid Spells

Venomous Volley: Cone of fangs damages and weakens targets.

3rd-Level Druid Spells

Crushing Coils: Teleport constrictor to crush opponent.

Fang Blade: Transforms a snake into a sword that can bite and poison targets.

Mershaulk's Kiss: Enhances a number of living snakes.

Snake Shield: Serpentine force surrounds you and protects you from attack.

4th-Level Druid Spells

Spitting Cobra: You make ranged attacks with a snake's venom.

5th-Level Druid Spells

Serpent Storm: Creates a hail of deadly serpents that bite and poison everyone in the area.

Ranger Spells

3rd-Level Ranger Spells

Fang Blade: Transforms a snake into a sword that can bite and poison targets.

Sorcerer/Wizard Spells

4th-Level Sorcerer/Wizard Spells

Fang Blade: Transforms a snake into a sword that can bite and poison targets.

Crushing Coils: Teleport constrictor to crush opponent.

5th-Level Sorcerer/Wizard Spells

Spitting Cobra: You make ranged attacks with a snake's venom.

scratches per round. A Reflex save halves this damage. In addition, creatures caught inside the area must succeed at a Fortitude save or be poisoned by the bites. This poison deals an initial 1d4 points of Constitution damage and has no secondary damage. Creatures that avoid all of the bite damage avoid the poison as well. Creatures that remain in the area are subject to the poison damage each round.

Finally, the area covered by this spell is treated as difficult terrain for the duration of the spell. The snakes that make up this spell appear just like the focus snake, but they are magical in nature and cannot be harmed.

Focus: One snake that is no more than one size larger than you.

Snake Shield

Evocation
Level: Clr 3, Drd 3
Components: V, S, F
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Personal
Target: You
Duration: 1 round/level (D)

Grasping a snake in your hands, you infuse it with magical energy that creates a shimmering field containing the essence of its predatory instincts and stinging fangs. To observers, it appears as a cloud of ghostly snakes floating in a tight spiral around you. Anyone who attempts to touch you, either to deliver a spell or to strike you with a weapon, suffers an attack from these snakes. These snakes attack with the focus snake's normal bite attack bonus. If it has any special abilities, such as constrict, improved grab, or poison, it may use them against its target as normal (although it may only make a grapple check to hold and constrict for 1 round, and may not maintain a grapple in subsequent rounds).

The snake can attack a single target once per round, but there is no limit to the number of different targets it can attempt to strike.

Focus: A living snake.

Spitting Cobra

Transmutation
Level: Drd 4, Sor/Wiz 5
Components: V, S, F
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: 0 ft.
Effect: Venom concentrated within the focus snake
Duration: 1 min./level (D)
Saving Throw: Fortitude negates
Spell Resistance: No

You siphon forth the venom of the focus snake and distill it into a deadly toxin. For the duration of the spell you can spray forth this venom from your outstreched hand. This allows you to make a ranged touch attack once per round at a target within 120 feet. This attack delivers the focus snake's poison as a blast of concentrated venom. Upon a successful attack, the target is affected by the poison as if bitten by the focus snake and is allowed a Fortitude save equal to the spell's DC. Use the snake's type to determine initial and secondary poison damage as normal (1d6 Con damage, initial and secondary, for a normal viper). This attack gains no benefit from a successful critical hit. Each attack you make reduces the spell's remaining duration by 2 minutes. If an attack reduces the remaining duration to 0 minutes or less, the spell ends after the attack is resolved. The focus snake used for this spell must be willing and it loses its poison attack for the duration of the spell.

Focus: A live, venomous snake no larger than your size category. A non-poisonous snake causes the spell to fail.

Venomous Volley

Evocation
Level: Clr 2, Drd 2, Sor/Wiz 2
Components: V, S, F
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: 15 ft.
Area: Cone-shaped burst
Duration: Instantaneous; see text
Saving Throw: Reflex half
Spell Resistance: Yes

A cone of venomous fangs shoots from your fingertips. Any creature in the area of the cone takes 1d6 points of damage per two caster levels (maximum 5d6). A Reflex save halves this damage.

In addition, anyone caught in the area of this spell suffers a –4 penalty on all Fortitude saves to resist poison for 1 minute per caster level. There is no save versus this effect, although spell resistance does apply.

Focus: A living snake.



by Richard Pett
illustrated by Jeff Carlisle

The Jester



Let them think you're a fool, rather than know you're a rogue.
—J.V. Jones, "A Man Betrayed"

Irreverent, motley, self-indulgent, witty, and roguish, the jester has the ear of all. One skilled at his trade also gains the admiration, trust, and friendship of his audience. No one thinks ill of the fool, but the jester is no fool. The trusted clown with the ear of the noble court, the comic actor whom everyone flocks to see, or the juggler on the street corner bringing laughter to the poor—when you perform all eyes watch you and the crowd is at your mercy. You play the fool, but laughter is a powerful tool and you use it better than anyone.

Becoming a Jester

The bard class provides the easiest path to becoming a jester, as Bluff and Perform skills are class skills and many of the bard's abilities enhance the jester's abilities. Monks and rogues also make good entry paths, as rogues need not take any cross-class skills and monks need only pick up Bluff. Charisma (for Perform checks and spellcasting) and Dexterity (for sneaking and tumbling) are key ability scores for you.

Class Features

As they advance in level, jesters gain abilities in Perform that make their spells more potent. They also gain a number of spell-like abilities to compliment their improved spells. For all spell-like abilities, your caster level equals your jester levels plus your bard levels (if any), and the DCs equal 10 + spell level + Charisma modifier.

Weapons and Armor Proficiency: The jester gains no proficiency with any weapons or armor.

Enhanced Perform (Ex): Select one Perform skill in which you have at least 13 ranks. You gain a bonus on all checks of the appropriate Perform skill equal to your jester level. Your exceptional talent allows you to make unequaled performances, as shown in the Enhanced Perform Check sidebar.

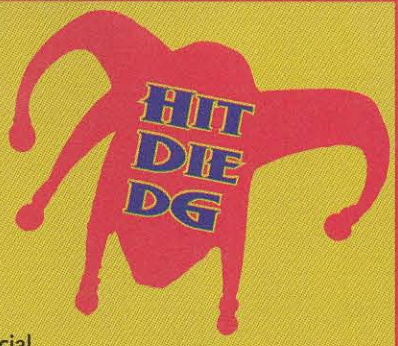
Enthrall (Sp): You can cast *enthrall* once per day per two jester levels (minimum once per day).

Tasha's Hideous Laughter (Sp): You can cast *Tasha's hideous laughter* once per day per jester level.

Vice Versa (Ex): At 2nd level your special training enables you to use your act as a tool to befriend, befuddle, or belittle. Once per day per two jester levels you can choose to use the result of a Perform skill in place of a Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate check.

Little Spell (Sp): At 2nd level and again at 3rd level, choose a spell from the following list to cast as a spell-like ability once per day: *dominate person, modify memory, phantasmal killer,* or *shout*. Once you have chosen a spell for this ability you may not change it later.

The Jester



Jester Entry Requirements
Perform (comedy) 13 ranks,
Perform (any other) 13 ranks,
Bluff 6 ranks.

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+0	+0	+2	+0	Enhanced Perform, *enthrall*, *Tasha's hideous laughter*
2nd	+1	+0	+3	+0	Little spell, vice versa
3rd	+2	+1	+3	+1	Little spell, *ridicule of persuasion*
4th	+3	+1	+4	+1	Silently enthralling laugh
5th	+3	+1	+4	+1	Middling spell
6th	+4	+2	+5	+2	Middling spell, *ridicule of insanity*
7th	+5	+2	+5	+2	Quick enthralling laugh
8th	+6	+2	+6	+2	Mighty spell
9th	+6	+3	+6	+3	Quick and silently enthralling laugh
10th	+7	+3	+7	+3	Mighty spell, *ridicule of death*

Class Skills (6 + Int modifier per level): Balance, Bluff, Climb, Diplomacy, Disguise, Escape Artist, Gather Information, Knowledge (local), Knowledge (nobility and royalty), Perform, Sense Motive, Sleight of Hand, Tumble.

Ridicule of Persuasion (Sp): Beginning at 3rd level you gain the ability to infuse your jests and wordplay with magical energy. These ridicules, as they are called, take several different forms. A ridicule simulates a specific spell, but it has only a verbal component and it is a language-dependent, mind-affecting effect.

The least powerful ridicule, the *ridicule of persuasion*, mimics the effects of the *charm monster* spell, but with the modifications common to all ridicules.

At 3rd level, you may use only one ridicule per day.

Silently Enthralling Laugh (Su): At 4th level you gain the ability to cast silent versions of your *enthrall* and *Tasha's hideous laughter* spell-like abilities, as if you were using the Silent Spell metamagic feat. This does not increase the number of spell-like abilities you may use in one day.

Middling Spell (Sp): At 5th level and again at 6th level, choose a spell from the following list to cast as a spell-like ability once per day: *mind fog*, *mislead*, *song of discord*, or *mass suggestion*. Once you have chosen a spell for this ability you may not change it later.

Ridicule of Insanity (Sp): Beginning at 6th level you gain access to the *ridicule of insanity*, which mimics the effects of the *insanity* spell, but with the modifications common to all ridicules.

At 6th level, you may use a total of two ridicules per day.

Quick Enthralling Laugh (Su): At 7th level, once per day you may choose to cast a quickened version of your *enthrall* and *Tasha's hideous laughter* spell-like abilities in place of a silent version, as if you were using the Quickened Spell metamagic feat. This does not increase the number of spell-like abilities you may use in one day.

Mighty Spell (Sp): At 8th level and again at 10th level, choose a spell from the following list to cast as a spell-like ability once per day: *demand*, *Otto's irresistible dance*, *scintillating pattern*, or *greater shout*. Once you have chosen a spell for this ability you may not change it later.

Quick and Silently Enthralling Laugh (Su): At 9th level you may cast quickened, silent versions of your *enthrall* and *Tasha's hideous laughter* spell-like abilities three times per day in place of normal, silent, or quickened versions. This does not increase the number of spell-like abilities you may use in one day.

Ridicule of Death (Sp): At 10th level you gain access to the *ridicule of death*, which mimics the effects of the *power word kill* spell, but with the modifications common to all ridicules.

At 10th level, you may use a total of three ridicules per day.

Playing a Jester

Jesters come in various guises, from the scheming confidant plotting behind the throne to the humble street entertainer combining his foolery with cutpurse skills to make a living. Jesters can use their high Perform bonuses to build themselves considerable reputation and fame (or infamy). Various personages of power throughout the world might well come to notice their skills and give jesters opportunities that lead to various adventures.

Players can use the jester's mixture of performance magic to good effect in many situations and, combined with the skills of other mischievous classes, open interesting options of play. The character's Perform skill, when used to bluff, intimidate, or coerce through diplomacy, becomes a powerful tool.

Jesters tend to work alone, using their skills to achieve their own ends. Many nobles and powerful individuals recognize the usefulness of having a friendly face in an opposing court and utilize the jester as a capable spy or diplomat.

Combat: Jesters are generally weak combatants and rarely enter a fair fight. Use your *Tasha's hideous laughter* and other powers of persuasion to overcome those who start out as enemies and convert them into allies to do your dirty work.

Once you reach 2nd level you gain access to aggressive enchantment spells and even more powerful attack spells from the enchantment and illusion schools.

Beginning at 3rd level you gain access to the potent ridicules. While 3rd level's

Enhanced Perform Check

The jester's enhanced Perform ability allows him to succeed with performances beyond the levels of even the most accomplished bard. The following table adds to that found on page 79 of the *Player's Handbook*. These additions might apply to performers of other classes with few alterations.

Perform DC	Performance
40	Incredible performance. In a prosperous city, you can earn 1d6 platinum/day. Your fame begins to spread, people try to repeat your acts on street-corners, your jokes are told in all the local taverns and inns, and in a short time you might begin to draw attention from distant potential patrons or even extraplanar beings.
50	Legendary performance. In a prosperous city you can earn 3d6 platinum/day. Your fame spreads. People might stop you in the street and want to be your friend, children sing songs about your act, and other lesser performers attempt inadequate copies. Your performances are bound to bring attention from potential patrons or extraplanar beings.
75	Divine performance. You attract the attention of extraplanar creatures. Deities (not necessarily good or neutral ones) request you to play for them.

ridicule of persuasion is good, 6th level's *ridicule of insanity* can lay low even the most powerful living creature. Finally, the *ridicule of death* has the potential to end a fight—maybe even before it starts.

Advancement: Jesters tend to work alone, but many feel it their duty to take on an apprentice to ensure that jesters always exist. On rare occasions, whole performing troupes of jesters congregate upon towns and cities to form guilds, where they send apprentices on missions to gather information and hone their Bluff and Diplomacy skills.

At first, you might be sent to gather intelligence or use your Perform as a distraction while allied rogues and jesters use your audience's laughter as both a cover and a signal. If apprenticed to a single jester, you might find him using your skill in Disguise to pretend to be him while he carries out other missions.

As you gain more levels ensure that your Perform skills rise appropriately. Use the freedom offered by the vice versa ability to train in a wide range of other skills, such as Climb, Disguise, and Tumble. Knowledge (nobility and royalty) can heighten your standing and give you an impeccable public persona. Spend your earnings on magic to bolster abilities and skills where you are weakest.

Resources: Successful jesters have the ear of the noble court, the trust of the public, and the friendship and admiration of all. They know secrets for which people are willing to pay. You can also purchase this knowledge from other jesters and get to know your new audience before you even take your first tumble or call out your first jape.

The more experienced jesters have rich earnings and fame. This gives them access to all kinds of unusual and magic items. It also allows the master jester to call in the sort of favors that cannot normally be bought, such as access to royal balls, special passes to restricted areas, and keys to royal libraries and houses.

Jesters in the World

It is meat and drink to me to see a clown.
—William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

If the PCs mingle in the courts of royalty or wander the alleys between the great theater of some metropolis they will eventually come across jesters. Most cultures have customs that allow every jester a chance to perform for a meal and bed. The jester might need to bear the heckles as well as the laughter, but those who impress might be asked to stay. Those who offend sometimes find themselves chased out of town. Connection with a friendly jester can give the PCs a chance to interact at a high social level.

Organization: Jesters occasionally work as a pair—master and apprentice—and rarely a whole company or ensemble forms within a theater or circus. On such occasions the ensemble usually takes some fanciful name to inspire the public, such as Hugo Horatio's Tumbling Twits, Mungo Mogwids Mordantly Meritorious Mirthmakers, or Cadwallader's Cackling Clowns. These ensembles might eventually earn considerable reputations and sometimes seek to employ other jesters.

Besides serving as entertainers, jester troupes often secretly work as spies, saboteurs, or simple rumor mongers. Ensembles generally have several secret missions going on simultaneously and many performances might pass before the true mission unfolds. Sometimes the mission is simply to remain friendly with useful allies.

Laughter pays handsomely and the most powerful jesters can influence kingdoms as if part of the nobility. The words of these masters live on after their deaths, when their deeds and performances become legend. Such virtuosos command immense fees.

Jesters might use their wits in a barbed way, belittling or humiliating opponents or those who have dared to cross them. In fact, some members of royalty require their master jesters to mock hated rivals in public places. Such actions, of course, earn the undying enmity of those humiliated.

Failed performances live long in the audience's memory and horrific gaffes might haunt the jester for the rest of his life. One way around this possibility is for the jester to take on a stage name, which he then discards if he suffers a socially debilitating failure. The more dramatic and notable the name the easier it is for the jester's admiring public to remember it. Few remember Jobe Bog, famous wit with a grey smock and brown cap, but everyone who saw him remembers

Babbling Jobe the Warbling Fool, with his distinctive copper megaphone carved with the likeness of laughing horses and his bright red jester's outfit covered in bells. Such a figure might be known across the city. Jobe can then peacefully go about his daily business anonymously while the Warbling Fool plies his trade by night, a figure known and welcomed by all.

NPC Reactions

Nobles and the public generally have a starting reaction to jesters of indifferent. However, regardless of an NPC's attitude, convention states that a jester is guaranteed an opportunity to perform for his meal and bed. Whether at a street corner tavern or a noble's court, how well the audience receives the jester depends entirely upon his performance.

Rival jesters always have an initial attitude of unfriendly. Competition is hot, rivalries intense, and no one gives up an audience without a fight.

Jester Lore

Characters may attempt Knowledge (local) or Knowledge (nobility and royalty) to research jesters. When a character makes a skill check, read or paraphrase the information below, remembering that higher checks reveal information from lower DCs as well.

DC 10: "Jesters provide entertainment for all from the simple street juggler to the most admired comic actors in the land."

DC 15: "Tradition allows jesters a chance to make a performance in exchange for room and board."

DC 20: "Imagine having the ear of a local lord or lady! Jesters must know a lot of secrets and information."

DC 30: Characters who achieve this level of success can learn important information about specific jesters or ensembles in your campaign as well as the necessary protocols or intermediaries to contact them.

PCs trying to make contact with jesters must make a DC 20 Gather Information check. Remember that very few street entertainers, clowns, or mummers actually possess levels in the jester prestige class. If PCs have something useful to the jester, such as information or a magic item to offer, they should receive a +2 circumstance bonus on the attempt.

Jesters in the Game

Because comics, street actors, tumblers, and jugglers show up everywhere, you can easily add a jester to your ongoing campaign.

The prestige class appeals to players who enjoy roleplaying and interaction with NPCs, infiltrating courts or theaters, and using legendary performances to enhance their already considerable reputation. Players can utilize these close relationships to their own ends. Everyone likes to laugh, and even the most depraved and evil creatures might find some cruel comedy amusing. The jester can open doors that normally must be forced and with a captive audience the effect of some of his spells can be devastating. If you have a jester in your campaign, give him an unusual audience occasionally and an opportunity to open those doors, perhaps even giving the players a chance to circulate in noble courts or legendary theatres where doubtless adventure abounds.

Adaptation

The jester is a fairly generic class, and should fit into any campaign with little or no customization.

Encounters

As the DM, jesters give you a double-edged sword to use. You can use the prestige class as a straight character, a villain of the worst sort who uses his reputation and skills to some fiendish end, or you can use the jester as lighthearted relief in your campaign, accommodating adventures to suit such comedic characters.

EL 12: Ruster Quiggley has seemingly fallen on hard times, and performs nightly at the inn the PCs are currently resting in. Every night Ruster appears and tells particularly tall tales about his times as an adventurer, of the battles he's endured, and of the infernal alliances he's boldly faced. Terrible stories such as the vile collusion between the vampire spawn soul-eater ropers of Muggley Moor and their hellish ghost owlbear vermin-lord accomplices fill his repertoire. Of course, one night Ruster approaches the heroes asking for their help.

Ruster Quiggley, male human bard 10/jester 2: CR 12; Medium humanoid (human); HD 12d6; hp 42; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (+2 Dex), touch 12, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +8/+3; Grp +8; Atk +8 melee (1d6, sap); Full Atk +8/+3 melee (1d6, sap); SA bardic music, spells, spell-like abilities; SQ bardic knowledge, enhanced Perform (comedy), vice versa; AL CN; SV Fort +5, Ref +11, Will +8; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 15.

Skills: Bluff +2 (+22*), Craft (painting) +7, Diplomacy +2 (+22*), Escape Artist +16, Hide +1, Intimidate +2 (+22*), Knowledge (arcana) +15, Knowledge (history) +17, Knowledge (the planes) +17, Listen +3, Move Silently +1, Perform (act) +17, Perform (comedy) +22, Perform (percussion instruments) +17, Perform (sing) +17, Perform (string instruments) +17, Spot +3.

* Using the vice versa ability.

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Craft Wand, Great Fortitude, Skill Focus (Craft [painting]), Skill Focus (Perform [comedy]).

Languages: Aquan, Common, Gnome.

Bard Spells Known (3/4/4/2; caster level 10): 0—*dancing lights, mage hand, mending, message, open/close, prestidigitation;* 1st—*feather fall, obscure object, remove fear, unseen servant;* 2nd—*glitterdust, invisibility, rage, sound burst;* 3rd—*blink, dispel magic, fear, lesser geas.*

Possessions: +1 padded armor, +1 ghost touch sap, bag of tricks (rust), ring of protection +1, deck of illusions, potion of eagle's splendor, potion of cure light wounds (×3), *wand of charm person* (50 charges), 1,250 gp worth of jewelry and mundane gear.

by Andy Collins
illustrated by Niklas Janssen

OFFICIAL ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS



This month, the Sage takes on the topics of druids and damage reduction. If you have questions for the Sage, send them to **sageadvice@paizo.com**.

In 3.5, it appears that druids only lose their abilities when using metal armor or shields, but not when wielding non-druid weapons (as was previously true). Is this the case? For instance, could a barbarian/druid wield a greataxe without losing his abilities?

Beginning with version 3.5 of the D&D rules, druids have no restriction regarding which weapons they can wield. A druid could wield a greatsword, halberd, or repeating crossbow without any ill effect (other than the normal penalty for non-proficiency). This is a specific change from previous versions of the game.

The *Player's Handbook* says that a druid loses his abilities if he "carries a prohibited shield." Can a druid carry such an item (say, in a backpack) without actually using it and not lose druid abilities?

The druidic restriction against using certain kinds of armor or shields applies only to actually wearing or carrying them in a functional manner. Simply holding such an item, or carrying it in a backpack or *bag of holding*, has no effect on the druid's abilities.

In the animal companion sidebar (*Player's Handbook*, page 36), it says that animal companions have good Fortitude and Reflex saves, which are also the good saves for all regular animals. However, dire animals have good progression in all three saves. Thus, what happens when a dire animal becomes a druid's animal companion?

The line in question simply reiterates the normal rule for animals for ease of play. Dire animals use their normal good saves, even after becoming animal companions.

My druid wants to take an animal companion that isn't listed in the *Player's Handbook*. How can I figure out what druid level is required for the animal I want?

The list of eligible animals in the *Player's Handbook* isn't exhaustive, even if you only include the animals from the *Monster Manual*. (Plenty of weak animals, such as the bat or raven, aren't included because they are such poor choices for animal companions.) If you want to select an animal that isn't included, compare your animal to other animals to find the closest equivalent then place it at the same level as the equivalent creature. As long as your new animal isn't strictly better than the best other option(s) at that level, you're probably okay.

If your animal is strictly better—that is, its hit points, attack modifier, damage, and other statistics are generally better than any others at the same level—consider bumping it up to the next-higher level (such as from 7th to 10th). Conversely, if it seems much worse than all other creatures available at the same level, consider dropping it to the next-lower level, such as from 7th to 4th, but only if this doesn't make it the best choice of that level. (It's better for a new choice to be a little bit worse than existing choices than a little bit better, as that prevents it from becoming the default option of all druids.)

For example, the dire toad is a CR 3 animal from *Monster Manual II*. It's clearly better than the druid's best choices for 1st level (such as the wolf), so let's start by comparing it to 4th-level options. Its hit points and AC (15 and 26) are similar to the ape (14 and 29), boar (16 and 25), and crocodile (15 and 22). Its attack bonus (+5) is also comparable to other creatures in that category, although its damage (1d4) is pretty low in comparison. However, its bite has a potent poison (1d6 Con/1d6 Con), which more than makes up for this low damage. It also has improved grab, just like the crocodile. That suggests that 4th level might be a good minimum level for a druid to select a dire toad as an animal companion. It's definitely too weak to make a 7th-level option (compare its statistics to the brown bear, dire ape, or tiger).

As with any instance when the DM is making a judgment call, make sure to review the decision after a few sessions. It's possible that the animal is better (or worse) than the original evaluation indicated and the DM should feel free to adjust his previous ruling.

When a druid reaches the equivalent of 3rd level, does his wolf animal companion grow to Large size (with all of the benefits and penalties associated with size increase)? Does the wolf continue to gain bonus Hit Dice, even though a wolf's advancement normally maxes out at 6 Hit Dice? Finally, does a wolf automatically become Large if your

druid of 3rd or higher level acquires it as an animal companion, granting it bonus Hit Dice?

The animal companion rules—or for that matter, pretty much any other effect that grants a creature bonus Hit Dice—don't use the monster improvement rules presented in Chapter 4 of the *Monster Manual*. The rules in the *Monster Manual* are for creating tougher versions of existing monsters, not for increasing the statistics of creatures who somehow gain Hit Dice.

An animal's normal advancement line has absolutely nothing to do with the benefits it gains from being an animal companion, and vice versa. A wolf animal companion doesn't become size Large when its Hit Dice increase to 4, nor is it limited to the normal Hit Dice cap for wolves.

Can a druid cast *awaken* on a plant that isn't a tree? What about on a shambling mound, treant, or other creature with the plant type?

No to both, as revealed by the "Target" line of the spell's entry on page 202 in the *Player's Handbook*. The spell clearly states that it affects only the "animal or tree touched," and plant creatures by definition are not trees.

Can a druid cast *awaken* on an already *awakened* tree?

Yes, although the effect of a second *awaken* spell doesn't stack. The tree would use the better result of the Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores rolled by the two awaken spells. Note that the caster can't know the result of these rolls until after the Will save required by the effect has been determined (which means that the spell might unintentionally reduce the tree's mental faculties).

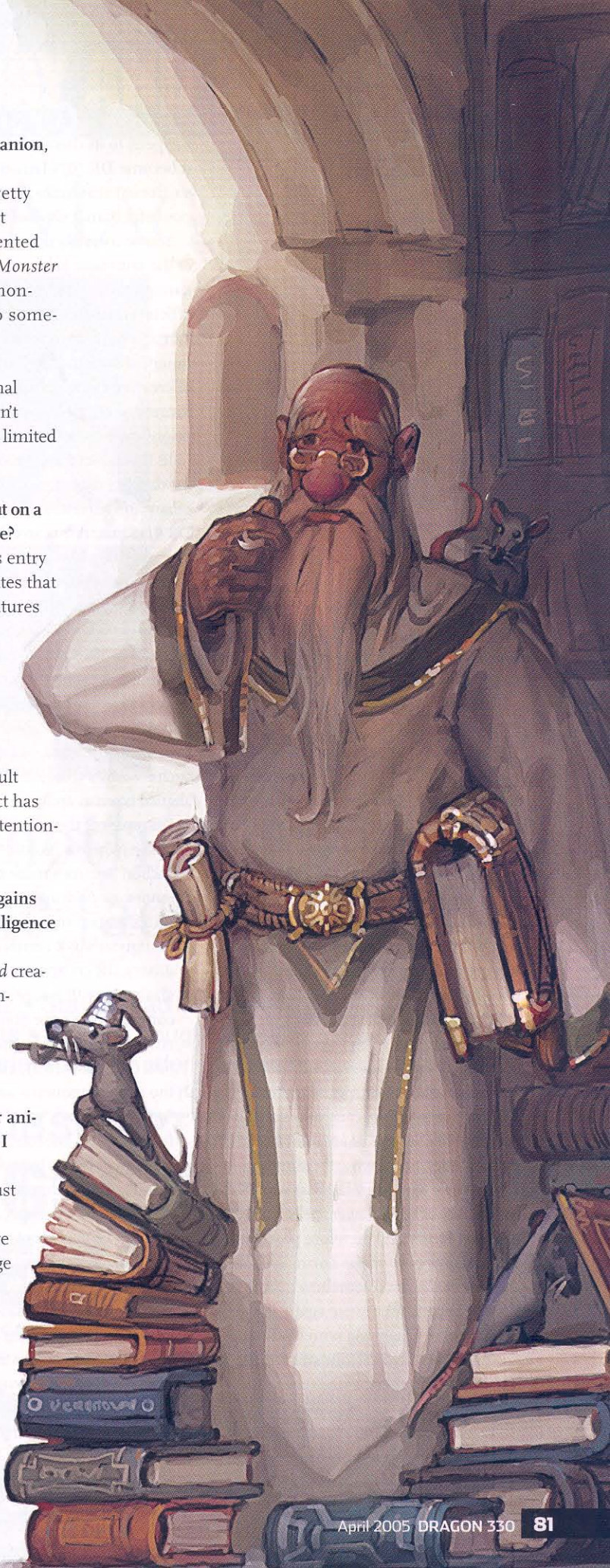
Are the additional languages an *awakened* tree or animal gains based on the Intelligence of the caster or on the new Intelligence score of the *awakened* creature?

The number of languages gained is based on the *awakened* creature's Intelligence score, although it may only select from languages that the caster already knows. This might result in the *awakened* creature being unable to fill all of its known languages slots (if its Intelligence score is too high).

Can a druid (or other character) take an *awakened* tree or animal as a cohort using the Leadership feat? If so, how do I figure out how powerful the cohort is in terms of level?

To select an *awakened* creature as a cohort, the player must work with the DM to set a level adjustment (LA) to add to the *awakened* creature's Hit Dice in order to find its effective character level (ECL). Most animals have better-than-average ability score modifiers, so level adjustments of 1 or higher should be the norm. Compare the *awakened* creature to other creatures with similar Hit Dice, attack modifiers, damage, and special abilities to find starting values and work from there, remembering that setting a level adjustment is as much art as science.

Savage Species has more information on setting LAs for unusual creatures.



DAMAGE REDUCTION

Unless otherwise stated by the monster's description, use these definitions to determine whether damage reduction components are extraordinary or supernatural.

Extraordinary

- DR #/slashing, piercing, or bludgeoning
- DR #/adamantine
- DR #/—

Supernatural

- DR #/silver or cold iron
- DR #/magic
- DR #/chaotic, evil, good, or lawful

If an *awakened* animal's type is permanently changed to animal (from magical beast), can it then become an animal companion, familiar, or special mount?

Two very large obstacles stand in the way of this odd request.

First of all, there aren't any simple methods of changing a magical beast's type to animal. By definition, an animal has an Intelligence of 1 or 2, both of which are outside the range of Intelligence scores granted by the *awaken* spell. Even permanently reducing the *awakened* animal's Intelligence score to 2 or less doesn't automatically change its type (note that several magical beasts have Intelligence scores of 2 or less).

Second of all, unless the DM grants special permission only "stock" versions of creatures can be used as animal companions, familiars, or special mounts. A druid, for example, can't voluntarily take a 4-Hit Die wolf as an animal companion, nor could a wizard claim that the cat she's using as a familiar was the beneficiary of several *wish* spells from a previous owner and therefore possesses ability scores beyond the norm. Even if an *awakened* animal somehow qualified to become an animal once again, it would have a higher Charisma score and more Hit Dice than a typical animal of its kind, making it ineligible for such use.

If a creature with "DR 10/adamantine or good" enters an *antimagic field*, what happens to its damage reduction? Does it become DR 10/adamantine, and if so, doesn't that make the creature more powerful than it was before?

You've correctly determined the effect of the *antimagic field* on the creature's damage reduction. As defined by the official errata for the *Monster Manual*, damage reduction can be either extraordinary or supernatural. In the case of creatures with damage reduction formed of multiple components, DR might even be both simultaneously!

In the case of this hypothetical creature, the damage reduction has both extraordinary and supernatural components. DR #/adamantine is an extraordinary special quality, and thus is not negated by an *antimagic field*, while DR #/good (as a supernatural quality) is negated. Thus, a creature with DR 10/adamantine or good within an *antimagic field* effectively has DR 10/adamantine. Of course, for the vast majority of characters the *antimagic field* also negates the "good" component of their weapon's attack, so this only affects such creatures whose attacks are naturally aligned (such as archons).

Examples of the odd situation you describe (where a monster's damage reduction becomes more potent within an *antimagic field*) are extremely rare. Such a situation only comes about when

1) a monster's DR combines an extraordinary DR component (such as slashing) with a supernatural DR component whose method of bypass isn't also negated by the *antimagic field* (such as silver), and
2) the two components are linked by "or" rather than "and."

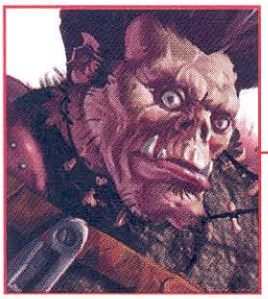
In most cases, DR components noted as supernatural require bypass methods that are also negated within an *antimagic field* (magic weapons, obviously, fall into this category, as do alignment components in the majority of situations). For those creatures whose damage reduction combines extraordinary and supernatural components with "and," dropping the supernatural portion actually makes the creature's DR weaker. A lich in an *antimagic field* has DR 15/bludgeoning rather than DR 15/bludgeoning and magic, which makes it easier to damage, not harder.

Dragon

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by Joshua Cole



IMPLACABLE BARBARIAN

The toughest dwarven warriors generally become dwarven defenders, but a few find the orderliness of most dwarven cultures a poor fit for their chaotic nature. Over the centuries these rowdy dwarves developed a combat style all their own. They call themselves implacables, and enemies of the dwarves fear their wrath.

THE IMPLACABLE

The implacable fighting style resembles that of many barbarians, but possesses enough subtle differences to make it uniquely dwarven. An implacable, like any barbarian, expends his energy in a short burst of rage, but rather than channel this wrathful energy into an overwhelming assault he channels it into defense.

Implacables study defense first to protect others and only secondarily to protect themselves. An implacable stays alive and in the enemy's path, letting his allies accomplish their mission. If forced to fight alone he throws all his energy into selling his life dearly. Before he falls, he kills as many of the enemy as possible.

Tougher even than a conventional barbarian and as determined as a dwarven defender, a single implacable can hold out against a large number of opponents. A large contingent of these indomitable warriors in the throes of their rage strikes fear into even small armies of foes.

Although dwarves begot the implacables, other races soon discovered their value. Gnomes and humans, trading partners with dwarves and more likely to embrace chaos, soon generated implacables of their own. These nondwarven implacables usually serve as dedicated protectors of their communities, although more than a few have exploited that protective power to make themselves into warlords.

Eventually, a few savage humanoids learned to emulate their opponents. Implacables receive less acclaim in orc society than conventional barbarians, but goblins and bugbears embrace the implacable style. These implacables give the savage races the perfect defense against the armies of civilized races.

GAME RULE INFORMATION

The implacable is a variant barbarian. Unless otherwise noted, an implacable advances in the same manner as a barbarian (same Hit Die, base attack bonus, saving throw bonuses, and so on). When a character elects to take a level of barbarian or implacable, he may not later take levels in the other. This prevents the character from gaining the benefits of a 1st-level barbarian twice.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: An implacable is proficient with all simple and martial weapons and with all armor and shields (except tower shields).

Fast Movement: An implacable does not get the fast movement class feature.

Resilient Rage: An implacable in a resilient rage looks less like a bloodthirsty reckless barbarian and more like an impatient but doggedly determined guardian. He doesn't gain the normal bonuses when he enters a rage. Instead, his rage more resembles the dwarven defender's defensive stance, granting him a +4 bonus to Dexterity and Constitution, a +2 bonus on Will saves, and damage reduction 1/—. This temporary damage reduction stacks with the permanent damage reduction the implacable gains at higher levels.

Resilient rage is otherwise identical to the standard barbarian rage in all respects. At 11th level (when a standard barbarian gains greater rage), the Dexterity and Constitution bonuses increase to +6, and the temporary damage reduction bonus improves to 2/—. At 20th level (when a standard barbarian gains mighty rage), the Dexterity and Constitution bonuses increase to +8, and the temporary damage reduction bonus improves to 3/—.

POWER PLAY: UNSTOPPABLE

Even at 1st level, few barriers can impede a determined barbarian. A raging 1st-level barbarian with a Strength score of 18 and the maximum number of ranks (4 at 1st level), can benefit from a +12 on his Climb, Jump, or Swim skill checks. Coupled with spells like *bull's Strength* (offering a +4 enhancement to Strength) and a specific skill-enhancing spell like *jump* (providing a +10 enhancement on Jump skill checks), a barbarian might gain up to a +26 bonus on such skills before even rolling.

by Hal Maclean



SONGS OF PEACE

BIRD

In a world of dragons and fiends, pacifists risk gaining an unfortunate nickname: lunch. Embracing a pacifist lifestyle presents risks and heartache, such as the danger of falling victim to someone who scorns your principles. You must avoid the disdain of your friends should they come to see you as a burden. Bards, however, due to their wide number of class abilities, find it an easier sell than many other character classes. All it takes is some forethought and preparation.

Start by finding ways to make yourself useful in areas outside of combat. Most groups appreciate class abilities such as bardic music and bardic knowledge. Take this one step further and give careful thought to your selection of skills, feats, and spells.

Bards count all ten Knowledge skills as class skills. Putting even a single rank into each of these trained-only skills goes a long way toward making you an invaluable councilor for the rest of your party. Similarly, only bards enjoy Speak Language as a class skill. This gives you an easy way to become the party's linguist since a single skill rank grants fluency. Excluding Common and Druid leaves you with eighteen available languages listed in the *Player's Handbook*. You should find little difficulty in mastering them all by 15th level. As you advance in levels, further enhance your usefulness by taking spells like *speak with animals* and *speak with plants*.

Since you plan to avoid fighting make sure to max out your Bluff and Diplomacy skills. Even the most bloodthirsty barbarian must concede that an unnecessary fight leaves you less able to prevail in later decisive battles. Putting the maximum ranks into these skills, coupled with your high Charisma, makes you a natural choice for party spokesman and gives you an easy way to steer your group away from plans that emphasize bloodshed and mayhem.

Of course, adventurers seldom lead lives of safety and comfort, so look for ways to serve a role in combat without violating your principles. Bolas and nets make for excellent ranged weapons, allowing you to trap your opponents without harm.

Choose all of your feats wisely since a number of them allow you to battle your foes without harming them. Feats such as Improved Disarm, Improved Grapple, and Improved Trip allow you to render an opponent almost completely ineffective.

Your spells offer you the best chance to prove your worth without harming anyone. The bard spell list teems with enchantments and other spells that allow you to reduce or even eliminate a foe's ability to harm others without directly injuring him. Area of effect spells like *confusion, fear,* and *scare* allow you to disperse throngs of enemies all at once. When looking for ways to bolster your ranks, never forget the effectiveness of spells like *charm person, lesser geas,* and *mass suggestion* to turn enemies into allies—if only temporarily.

SPELLS TO END FIGHTS

These bard spells can disable or disperse hostile creatures without causing them lasting harm (i.e. without dealing damage). A pacifist bard can cast these spells without violating his vow as long as he prevents his comrades from harming the targets later.

1st Level
Cause fear, charm person, hypnotism, lesser confusion, sleep, Tasha's hideous laughter.

2nd Level
Animal trance, blindness/deafness, daze monster, enthrall, glitterdust, hold person, hypnotic pattern, scare, suggestion.

3rd Level
Charm monster, confusion, deep slumber, fear, lesser geas, sepia snake sigil.

4th Level
Dominate person, hold monster, rainbow pattern, repel vermin.

5th Level
Mass suggestion.

6th Level
Mass charm monster, eyebite, geas/quest, Otto's irresistible dance.

by Mike Mearls



THE MULTICLASSED CLERIC

CLERIC

The cleric relies on the power vested in him by his deity, but sometimes a few extra tricks can prove handy. Clerics mix spellcasting and martial ability into one package, but in some ways they fall short of wizards on one hand and fighters on the other. They have access to spells that only affect specific types of creatures or alignments, while their average base attack bonus and limited weapons make them second to fighters, paladins, and other combat-focused characters.

Taking levels in classes other than cleric reduces your spellcasting and turning ability. Since you gain access to 9th-level divine spells at 17th level, you probably don't want to invest more than three levels in other classes. Your turning ability in particular suffers if you allow your cleric levels to lag.

Barbarian: If you are chaotic, barbarian offers useful talents that transform you from a secondary fighter to a frontline combatant. Rage temporarily boosts your Strength to help you smash through an opponent, while the barbarian's increased speed allows you to reach a companion who needs healing. However, you must wear medium or light armor to take advantage of all of the barbarian's abilities. Unless you have an above average Dexterity, this might not be a good trade.

Bard: Bardic music might seem like a good ability for a cleric, since it serves as another tool you can use to support and aid the party. Unfortunately, you cannot cast spells while singing. Furthermore, *bless* offers roughly the same benefits as inspire competence. Thus, this class makes a poor match for a cleric.

Druid, Sorcerer, and Wizard: In general, unless you want to gain levels in mystic theurge or a similar prestige class, avoid these paths. You give up your divine casting ability in return for a selection of low-level spells. None of these classes offer anything at low levels that outweighs higher-level cleric spells.

Fighter: This class is perhaps the best choice for non-chaotic clerics. The bonus feats you gain can help transform you from an average to a skilled combatant. The fighter's weapon proficiencies give you access to the longbow and other useful ranged weapons, allowing you to help out the party's warriors if you take Point Blank Shot and Precise Shot without exposing yourself (and your healing ability) to danger. If you prefer to wade into melee, Power Attack and Cleave can help you tear through the enemy.

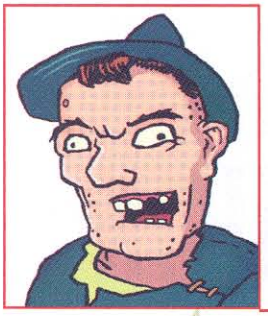
Monk: Since clerics generally rely on heavy armor, this class offers you little. You gain unarmed attacks, but your base attack bonus suffers due to the monk's average advancement in that area.

Paladin: If you are lawful good, the paladin can offer some talents that work nicely with the cleric's. Most clerics have an above average Charisma to improve their ability to turn undead. If you have a score above 14, the paladin class can give you a useful array of abilities. Detect evil allows you to quickly identify threats and, more importantly, targets for spells that have superior effects against evil creatures. Divine grace gives you a useful boost to your saves, allowing you to remain functioning and deliver spells such as *remove paralysis*.

Ranger: Unless you have your eyes on a prestige class, you gain little from taking levels in ranger. Rangers, unlike clerics, rely on light armor. In many ways, the ranger's spells duplicate the cleric's role as a supporting caster.

Rogue: While the rogue might seem like the cleric's opposite, this class can prove useful. If you have a high Charisma, you can invest ranks in skills such as Bluff, Diplomacy, and Gather Information. Sense Motive, Spot, and Listen all work well with your good Wisdom score. Avoid skills that rely on light armor, such as Hide or Balance, and focus on ones that you can use in heavy armor. Finally, sneak attack helps improve your ability as a support fighter.

by Ted Ragonstaff • illustrated by Tony Moseley



FLAWS FOR COMMONERS

COMMONER

You must be a 1st-level commoner to take these flaws and, as always, you may only take a flaw at 1st level. In fact, you may take up to two flaws (as explained in *Unearthed Arcana*) and for each flaw you may select an extra feat.

CHICKEN INFESTED

You've got chickens.

Effect: Whenever you draw a weapon or pull an item out of a container, you have a 50% chance of drawing a live chicken instead. No, we don't know where the chickens come from; it's your character.

CORPSE

You are dead.

Effect: You're dead, but you get an extra feat!

DELICIOUS

Someone cast *divine flavor* on you.

Effect: All monsters attack you if able, regardless of their attitude toward the rest of your party. In addition, you go down smooth. When subjected to a swallow whole special attack, you are treated as two size categories smaller than you actually are.

DIRT FARMER

You farm. Now get back to work, serf!

Effect: You must spend 18 hours every day farming for your liege. If you fail to spend 18 hours every day farming, your liege has you killed.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE ACCENT

Nobdy oonstens wu yi se.

Effect: No one can understand what you are saying. Your thick accent even baffles *comprehend languages* and similar magical effects.

NAGGING COUGH

You are sick.

Effect: You begin play afflicted with mummy rot. You've made no successful Fort saves to kick the disease.

PEASANT HAT

You have a peasant hat, like the one in the picture.

Effect: You suffer a –15 penalty on all Diplomacy checks. Other characters in your party can cast *command* on you once per day, with no save allowed.

Special: If you remove the hat, crows peck at your exposed brains, killing you.

PIG BOND

You have a pig. Good for you.

Effect: You must at all times carry a pig that weighs an amount equal to your maximum load. The pig refuses to walk on its own. If your Strength score increases, the weight of the pig increases to match your new maximum load. If your Strength score decreases... get a cart.

Special: If more than a few inches ever separates you and the pig, the pig transforms into Orcus and skins you (which probably kills you).

UNIMPORTANT NPC

Nobody cares about you.

Effect: You have no name. You are never included when the group divides its treasure. You are never part of the initiative order (and thus you always go last... if your DM even lets you go at all).

WERESHEEP

Theresheep!

Effect: You are afflicted with lycanthropy. Not such a flaw, right? Your hybrid and animal forms are of a harmless sheep. When in hybrid or animal form you suffer the effects of the Delicious flaw.

XP FARM

You're going to make someone very happy.

Effect: You are worth 10 times the normal XP for a creature of your CR.

by Mark A. Hart



BOOSTING YOUR ANIMAL COMPANION

DRUID

One of the druid's most formidable friends is her animal companion. This companion is a steadfast ally and in a low-level party it might have more hit points than most player characters. Given the dangers of adventuring, a druid should take steps to improve her companion's effectiveness and survivability. She can best accomplish this through the animal's power to share the druid's spells.

This article discusses spells that help protect a druid's animal companion, making it tougher, deadlier, or more versatile. Thanks to spell sharing, many of these can benefit both the druid and her companion if they remain within 5 feet of one another. Alternatively, the druid's spells that normally affect only her can affect her companion instead. This advice also applies to rangers with animal companions, as all the spells except *bull's Strength* and *rusting grasp* appear on the ranger's spell list.

Animal Growth: Nothing is quite as intimidating as a Large wolf or Huge dire wolf. Once a druid reaches 9th level, she should prepare this spell daily. Not only does the companion receive a +8 size bonus to Strength and +4 size bonus to Constitution, but the spell's duration lasts longer than most combats. The damage reduction the spell provides is another added bonus.

Barkskin: An animal companion can always benefit from a boost to its Armor Class. *Barkskin* provides at least a +2 enhancement bonus to natural armor and has an excellent duration of 1 hour per level.

Bear's Endurance, Bull's Strength, Cat's Grace: If the druid anticipates an encounter where Fortitude saves are likely, *bear's endurance* provides additional hit points and increases its Fortitude saves. *Bull's Strength* is especially useful in fights against weaker creatures where a few extra points of damage make the difference. *Cat's grace* improves the companion's AC and Reflex saves—which is helpful against spellcasters.

Longstrider: Movement speed is often critical in combat, especially when the enemy is out of reach. The additional 10 feet per round of movement this spell provides helps the druid and/or her companion reach the enemy faster. During a full-round move, this boost equals 20 feet; with a run, this translates to an additional 40 feet per round.

Magic Fang: The companion gains a +1 bonus on attack and damage rolls with one of its natural weapons. When combined with *bull's Strength*, the companion is at +3 to hit and damage. The spell's duration is long enough for the typical combat.

The bonus provided by *greater magic fang* increases as the druid gains levels. Alternatively, the druid can choose to have all her companion's attacks and damage at +1. The duration is impressive at 1 hour per caster level.

Reduce Animal: At times, the druid might find it necessary to shrink her companion. Perhaps the druid needs to carry her animal across a ravine or while climbing a rope; a smaller companion is a lighter companion. The spell has a lengthy duration, and the druid can dispel it at will.

Resist Energy: This spell, as well as *protection from energy*, helps protect the companion from energy damage. It is most beneficial when the druid knows what energy type she will encounter, such as fire or cold. For example, before the druid enters a red dragon's lair, she and her animal companion could share *resist energy* against fire. These protection spells are especially effective because they absorb more damage as the druid gains experience levels.

Rusting Grasp: As a sneaky trick, the druid can cast this spell on her companion, then the animal makes a melee touch attack against an enemy's sword or metal armor. If successful, the opponent could be effectively disarmed or suffer reduced AC. Of note, the companion risks an attack of opportunity when it attacks an enemy's weapon.

by Kieran Turley



THE CELTIC WARRIOR

FIGHTER

Over three thousand years ago the first Celtic tribes waged war against each other over land and pride. Celtic tribes moved throughout Europe, conquering the native peoples and even occupying mighty Rome for a time. The warrior class formed the backbone of these conquests, allowing the tribes to overpower the existing European peoples. The Celtic soldiers formed an elite class much like the noble knights of later times. Celtic warriors fought and ruled, supported by their peasant vassals. The Celtic warrior was a larger-than-life figure, an epic hero, and the defender of his tribe.

In D&D terms, the Celtic warrior comes closest to the fighter class in his use of weapons and armor. The primary weapon of a Celtic warrior was either a sword or spear. Shortswords, longswords, rapier-like piercing swords, long spears, and short spears commonly served as their weapons of choice. Swords, usually made of bronze or other soft metals, often had to be bent back into shape after striking an enemy. Thus, Celtic warriors often carried smaller weapons such as a shortsword or dagger as backups. They usually wore light armor consisting of ornate helmets designed to intimidate and either padded armor or ring mail (an inferior form of chain mail presented in the *Arms and Equipment Guide*). Some Celts wore no armor at all, leading some ancient authors to claim they went into battle naked. Celtic shields were typically ovate in shape, made of wood with a central raised boss made of hardened leather or metal.

Celts seeking to harm an enemy from range would use a sling or javelin. They rarely employed bows in combat, saving them for hunting. Slings were a common choice for siege defenders, but attackers preferred javelins. Skilled chariot riders, Celtic warriors often rode across enemy lines before a battle hurling insults and javelins. A driver would steer a light chariot—usually pulled by two horses—into combat, let a warrior passenger dismount, and retreat with the chariot until the battle ended.

The warrior Celt put a lot of stock in intimidation: If the enemy surrendered before battle was joined both sides could save precious resources. Tattoos, body paint, vicious-looking helmets, and a powerful voice were as much weapons to the Celts as swords and spears. Warriors had their vassals and bards shout of their previous conquests, building them up as terrifying figures to be feared and respected. Some sources claimed Celtic tribes were headhunters, taking the heads of fallen foes as trophies. This only added to their fearsome reputation.

The Celts settled an area so large that massive regional variations existed. Ireland, for example, rarely had swords greater than two feet in length and only infrequently suffered the great battles common on the continent. The Celts were almost unique in history in that both women and men served equally as warriors. They saw no reason to exclude their women from the role of warrior, although in later years the practice lost favor due to a fall in population.

Celtic warriors make interesting characters for the D&D game. In folklore, Celtic warriors were great fighters and thinkers. The mythical Celtic warrior could just as easily outthink an opponent as beat him in combat. In the D&D game a Celtic warrior might serve as a sort of "thinking man's lunatic," outwitting enemies but still retaining a wild and dangerous feel. Many of the core classes in the *Players Handbook* have strong Celtic influences (bard and druid in particular) and require little change should the DM decide to introduce his players to this fascinating culture.

CELTIC FEATS

This feat can give your character a Celtic feel.

Spear Master [General]

You are a master close combat spear fighter.

Benefit: You may choose to wield a spear or shortspear as a double weapon. If you do, you may deal bludgeoning damage with the blunt end of the spear. If enchanted, only one end of the spear uses the enchantment's bonus.

Special: A fighter may select Spear Master as one of his fighter bonus feats.

by Jacob Steinmann



MONK STYLES

MONK

The standard monk uses a set of weapons most commonly seen in traditional Okinawan and Japanese martial arts systems. The sai and kama, in particular, are often associated with the fighting methods of those island nations, while weapons like the quarterstaff are more widely used and practiced throughout the world. Many other fighting styles and cultures exist worldwide, and not all monks must practice the same martial arts. If your monk wants something a little different, try one of these real-world fighting styles from Southeast Asia.

THE GHURKA

Since the early 1800s, members of this Nepalese tribe have served as special forces for the British military. Noted for their stealth and ferocity in battle, the Ghurka earned great fame for themselves and their weapon of choice, the kukri. The kukri is a common tool for these people, and many children as young as five years old receive one. As the child grows, he develops great skill with the kukri, since it is used for everything from cutting wood to skinning game.

In a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS campaign, the Ghurka (or a similar tribe) might be special agents of a great empire, or just a small but deadly tribe hidden in a faraway mountain jungle. Many of the tribesmen could be rangers or barbarians, but monks represent the true masters of their fighting art.

A Ghurka monk loses proficiency in the kama, nunchaku, sai, shuriken, and siangham and gains proficiency in the kukri, short sword (some kukri are quite large), and short bow. The Ghurka monk uses the kukri, short sword, and club as special monk weapons.

ARNIS, KALI, ESCRIMA

These three terms refer to a wide variety of Filipino martial arts systems. Each has a long and unique history, and detailing each art is far beyond the scope of this article. They do share certain common traits and training methods that can be applied to the monk class.

Filipino martial culture makes extensive use of the knife, and some Filipinos carry a blade from an early age. Classical Filipino martial arts use blades as short as daggers or as large as longswords. During training, short sticks are often used as a substitute for blades and many Filipino masters are as dangerous with a stick as they are with a blade. Many of these styles teach the use of these weapons in pairs, a tactic than can be represented with the Two-Weapon Fighting feat in D&D.

Monks trained in Filipino martial arts lose proficiency in the kama, nunchaku, sai, shuriken, and siangham but gain proficiency in the short sword, longsword, and whip. Monks using this style count the club, dagger, quarterstaff, and short sword as their special monk weapons.

KRABI-KRABONG

Movies and kickboxing competitions have helped to popularize the art of Muay Thai, but Krabi-Krabong—a Thai weapons-based art—is less well known. The art is considered by some to be a predecessor of Muay Thai, and it utilizes many of the same powerful kicks, elbow, and knee strikes that Muay Thai is famous for. Thai culture is strongly Buddhist, and Krabi-Krabong incorporates many Buddhist rituals and beliefs into its training.

Krabi-Krabong teaches the use of five weapons and three types of shields. The weapons include the *daab*, a heavy curved sword often used in pairs (a technique referred to as *Daab Song Muun*); the *krabi*, a short saber; the *krabong*, a long bamboo staff; the *mae sun sowks*, a tonfa-like weapon also used in pairs; and the *ngao* (spear). The shields consist of the *dung* (long shield), *kaen* (medium shield), and *loh* (round shield). Techniques are often practiced with live blades, so students must learn control as well as power and timing.

In place of the kama, nunchaku, sai, shuriken, and siangham, monks trained in Krabi-Krabong learn the short sword, spear, and short spear and treat all those weapons as special monk weapons (as well as the club and quarterstaff). They also gain proficiency with all shields except tower shields, although they do not gain additional armor proficiency.

by Joshua Cole



A PALADIN BY NIGHT

PALADIN

The cause of good sometimes requires second-story work with swords at the ready, and now and then even the most lawful of warriors must trade in her blade for cloak and dagger. Fortunately for the forces of righteousness, even a paladin can go incognito—at least for a while.

UNARMORED AND READY

Because the iconic paladin takes the field decked out in full plate, brandishing a longsword, and riding a noble warhorse, most players forget that no game-rule considerations force paladins to always wear the heaviest armor and carry the most gear.

A paladin possesses the same sneaking ability as a fighter. If stealth becomes a common element in a campaign, a wise paladin invests some cross-class skill points in Hide and Move Silently. Such skills should assist her pursuit of justice as much as they would help other warriors in their tasks.

Paladins face no roleplaying restrictions against stealth. Slipping into an evil temple unnoticed to confront its inhabitants merely constitutes the path of least resistance. In cases where resistance takes the form of ritually dominated innocents, a paladin's code all but requires she sneak her way in.

Multiclassing restrictions disadvantage the paladin far more than her code when it comes to stealth. A fighter loses next to nothing by taking a few rogue or ranger levels to round out her skill set. Paladins, generally speaking, lack this option. However, a paladin who begins her career as a ranger or rogue and only adopts the mantle of paladinhood at a later level avoids this problem. The *Eberron Campaign Setting's* Knight Training feat offers an alternative route.

STRONG, SACRED, SILENT TYPE

If stealth lies outside the paladin's purview, subterfuge is absolutely forbidden.

When the cause of good requires infiltration, an agent whose code forbids mendacity of any sort becomes an encumbrance. Depending on the predilections of individual DMs, as little as a "these aren't the dwarves you're looking for" leaves a paladin in need of *atonement* and bereft of her powers, usually in the midst of hostile territory.

Fortunately, nothing in the paladin's code says she must speak when spoken to.

If the PCs set their sights on infiltrating a thieves' guild, an interview with the guildmaster probably looms in their future. The party's silver-tongued bard might have to apologize for his armored companion. "A very effective intimidator," explains the bard, "but not a big talker." An alternative for some overly fanatic paladins is to simply cut out their tongues to prevent themselves from speaking a lie (or at all).

Most paladins chafe at this sort of trickery (especially in its more painful incarnation). Fortunately, most quests require less extreme subterfuge. The typical evil temple, warlord's citadel, or lich's tower doesn't interrogate its mercenary hirelings. Its minions pay even less attention to a well-disguised group of cultists, vassals, or necromantic apprentices.

Since paladins often take the role of "party face" in honest dealings, they and their players might scoff at taking a back seat to the sneaky types just because the situation calls for questionably factual statements. Then again, they might not need to. The paladin must tell the truth, but when she tells the guard captain she possesses critical information for the evil warlord's she doesn't have to say that she intends to cross swords rather than share any secretive insights—particularly if the guard captain declines to ask.

KNIGHT TRAINING [GENERAL]

You are part of a knightly order that combines the divine calling of the paladin class with another form of training.

Benefit: Pick one class. Taking levels in this class does not prevent you from taking paladin levels. If you take levels in any other class, you lose your ability to progress as a paladin as usual. If the selected class also has restricted advancement, such as the monk class, taking paladin levels does not prevent you from advancing in that class.

by Amber E. Scott



FLIGHTS OF FANCY

RANGER

The notorious ranger Roberd of the Wood gained much fame for his deeds, his wild and generous spirit, and his unparalleled archery skills. Over the course of his career he developed several new types of arrows to aid him in his attempts to free the unjustly imprisoned and punish oppressors. His innovations spread quickly and many adventurers now use the arrows he designed.

Dyed Fletching: While colored fletching has long existed, Roberd developed a cheap and easy way to dye them. Fletching can be a solid color or marked with symbols—Roberd favored a distinctive green. See the Identifying Arrows sidebar.

Engraved Shaft: Roberd would often carve two lines on his arrow shaft just before the nock. Designs along the shaft make an arrow distinctive without impairing its flight. See the Identifying Arrows sidebar.

Hardwood Arrows: Hardwood shafts are simultaneously stronger and more flexible than a regular arrow's. A hardwood arrow that misses its target has only a 25% chance of being destroyed instead of 50%.

Pungent Arrows: Similar to powder arrows, these arrowheads deal no damage and contain a sticky, foul-smelling substance. Roberd used pungent arrows to delineate targets he wanted his fox companion to attack or to help track fleeing targets. Anyone tracking a person marked by a pungent arrow gains a +1 circumstance bonus on Survival checks made to track (+4 if the tracker has the scent ability) for one hour. The substance washes off in 5 minutes with ample water.

Singing Arrows: Roberd borrowed this technique from the elves. The elves carved a series of notches along their arrows so that, when fired, they emitted a distinctive series of notes. Elven troops firing in sequence could create chords or even whole songs this way. Roberd was content to design a single distinctive whistle for his own arrows.

Star Arrows: Through much experimentation, Roberd developed an alchemical compound that phosphoresced under particular conditions. A star arrow glows with a dim colored light when fired. The arrows shed bright light in a 5-foot radius and shadowy light in a 15-foot radius.

Zigzag Arrow: Roberd designed this forked arrowhead to make the arrow loop and spin crazily when fired. Later he realized the arrowhead was perfect for severing ropes and used them to save several innocents from hanging. Anyone firing a zigzag arrow takes a –4 penalty on attack rolls, but the arrow deals double damage to objects with a hardness of 0.

IDENTIFYING ARROWS

Anyone studying an arrow with a distinctive dyed fletching pattern or an engraved shaft that bears the known marks of a famous (or infamous) archer gains a +1 circumstance bonus on Knowledge (local), Knowledge (nobility and royalty), or bardic knowledge checks to determine the owner of the arrow. The fletching pattern or engravings must be unique to the archer seeking notoriety.

NEW TYPES OF ARROWS

Arrow	Cost	Weight	Type
Hardwood (20)	10 gp	5 lb.	Piercing
Pungent (20)	5 gp	3 lb.	—
Singing (20)	20 gp	3 lb.	Piercing
Star (20)	10 gp	3 lb.	Piercing
Zigzag (20)	3 gp	3 lb.	Slashing or piercing

Accessory	Cost
Dyed fletching (20)	8 sp
Engraved shaft (20)	1 gp

by Shelly Baur



MERCHANT ROGUES

ROGUE

Not every rogue lives on the wrong side of the law. Merchant-purveyors of the finest goods can hobnob with kings and queens, just as Genghis Khan received Marco Polo at his court. Respectable merchants command the highest prices for their hard-earned treasures and are eagerly greeted at the noblest homes and castles in the realm. Heralds and bailiffs, who would never stoop to open their doors to common adventurers, greet merchants fawningly. Player characters can easily adopt the guise of a merchant to gain these advantages.

Some merchants work both sides, fencing valuables, altering provenance, and gilding inferior goods. The most astute thieves often lead a double life as merchants, sometimes for the sheer thrill of the chase. Their position in society shields them from the city watch. A merchant rogue might be suspected, put under surveillance, or even accused (with evidence that would convict them)—if not for certain friends in high places. After all, a prince wouldn't want his source for the finest jewels and magic baubles hauled off to the dungeon over a simple misunderstanding.

The easiest way to become accepted as a more-or-less legitimate merchant is to own a shop. If run well the shop's steady income helps pay for adventuring. Otherwise, the shop's debts provide incentive to resume adventuring.

CHARACTERS AS MERCHANTS

The following merchant rogue professions work well as both player characters and NPCs. A single rank in the Profession skill is usually all a rogue needs to fake it.

Antiquarian: Add a few ranks of the Appraise skill and these rogues become ready experts. Buying and selling loot becomes a whole lot easier, as does separating the refuse from the priceless. Antiquarians often use their Charisma and their Bluff skill to try to persuade others—including PCs—to take the worst goods while they keep the best for themselves. Not surprisingly, the field includes many skilled at forgery too.

Caravan Leader: They know how to avoid highwaymen, travel safely in foreign lands, find the best inns and roads, whom to bribe, and when to smuggle. Caravan leaders often possess useful wilderness skills like Survival and Use Rope if they wish to return home. These specialized merchants get to know various noblepersons or members of their households, which is important for the caravan leader who needs to slip into a manor house or other secure location.

Gem Merchant: Besides cutting the best deals on gems, these merchants often travel to establish sources and markets. To foil thieves, gem merchants often have numerous disguises, and guard their goods with mundane and magical locks and hidden compartments.

Horse (or Magical Mount) Dealer: These rogues doctor mounts, fix races (winning big money), and breed rarities. Dealers always get the best deals whether buying or selling. They know how far mounts can be pushed—very important when they need to make a swift getaway. Naturally, these rogues take many ranks in Handle Animal and often take the Animal Affinity feat.

Map Seller: Not only do they find treasure maps but they can see hidden marks, map dungeons, and perceive where hidden passages lie. Kings often view mapmakers as valuable spies and as the holders and gatherers of state secrets, crucial to waging war. For instance, King Henry VIII commissioned maps showing Scottish harbors as well as political maps marking which keeps enemies and sympathizers held.

Tailor: The personal touch these rogues have build loyalties and create a client network akin to a spy ring. They often come to know their clients' secrets, enough to expose them to blackmail. Besides altering appearances and readily detecting disguises using their Disguise skill, tailors often seek magic items and potions related to youth, beauty, and charisma. After all, they've got an image to maintain.

Wine Merchant: During lavish parties that showcase their goods, wine merchants become privy to secrets and rumors, especially as the evening wears on. They might make side deals that clients regret when sober again. A sensitive palate might enable them to detect poisons and they have a high tolerance for drinking others under the table.

by John E. Ling, Jr.



SORCERERS ARE SPECIAL...ISTS, TOO

SORCERER

Some sorcerers have figured out how to tap deeper into the power of their magical ancestors, gaining access to spheres of power over which those ancestors controlled.

THE BASICS OF SPHERES

Specialist sorcerers have themes, referred to among arcane scholars as spheres.

A sphere represents an area with which you have an easier time focusing your arcane energies. Your sphere is the result of a powerful magical creature as an ancestor. You must choose your sphere at 1st level, and you may not change your sphere once you select it nor may you get rid of your sphere in order to become a general sorcerer. You cast all spells from your sphere at +1 caster level. This bonus does not apply to the use of spell trigger and spell completion items that use spells from your sphere.

Your sphere has an opposite, however, a type of magic in which your power is weaker. You cast all spells from your opposed sphere at –2 caster levels. Note that this penalty can delay your access to some spells. For example, if Aphrella has fire as her opposed sphere, she would need to wait until she was a 7th-level caster until she could cast *fireball*. In addition, you are unable to activate spell trigger and spell completion items from your opposed sphere.

CREATING SPHERES

Spheres should be narrower than spell schools, but not so narrow as to only affect a handful of spells. You and your DM should work together to determine what is fair for your campaign. When creating spheres and opposed spheres, the number of spells on each list should be roughly equal and of the same overall power. For example, while spells of the compulsion subschool might make a good sphere, spells of the charm subschool would make a poor opposed sphere since so few spells exist in that subschool. A spell might appear in multiple schools of magic.

EXAMPLE SPHERES

Presented here are five sample spheres which you can reverse for a total of ten useable spheres. For example, you can reverse the fire sphere to create the cold sphere. All spells with the cold descriptor belong to the cold sphere while all spells with the fire descriptor become your opposed sphere. Use these spheres as templates for creating your own.

Acid

An especially powerful black dragon is among your ancestors. Spells with the acid descriptor belong to your sphere. Spells with the electricity descriptor make up your opposed sphere.

Air

One of your ancestors was a djinni. Spells with the air descriptor belong to your sphere. Spells with the earth descriptor make up your opposed sphere.

Fire

A fire giant resides in your family tree. Spells with the fire descriptor belong to your sphere. Spells with the cold descriptor make up your opposed sphere.

Shadow

A powerful denizen of the Plane of Shadow is one of your relatives. Spells from the illusion (shadow) subschool belong to your sphere. Spells with the light descriptor make up your opposed sphere.

Summoning

A powerful conjurer resides in your family's ancestry. Spells from the conjuration (summoning) subschool belong to your sphere. Spells from the conjuration (creation) make up your opposed sphere.

by Eric Rampson



VERBAL COMPONENTS

WIZARD

Nearly every wizard spell requires a verbal component, although a wizard probably doesn't shout "I'm going to cast *magic missile*" when she casts *magic missile*. So what, exactly, does she say?

The answer is easy: Whatever you decide.

Adding verbal components to each spell in your wizard's spellbook can greatly enhance your roleplaying experience as well as that of your entire group. When your turn in the initiative comes up and you say "athac chlorum est" with a wave of your hand, your fellow players smirk, knowing a *magic missile* spell follows.

First, decide how you want to construct your components. Does your wizard use understandable phrases or mysterious arcane words when casting? Understandable phrases have the advantage of being easily identified. "I call upon the fury of fiery realms to strike my foe" makes an easily identifiable *fireball*, for instance. On the other hand, arcane words add an air of mystery to the magic your wizard uses.

Using phrases for verbal components requires creativity. How does your wizard speak normally? Is he pompous and arrogant or simple and straightforward? Use the character's personality to influence the phrases he intones to cast his spells. An officious, stuffy wizard might say something like, "May Melf's might melt mine enemy" when casting *Melf's acid arrow*. Use alliteration or rhyme only if it fits your wizard's personality. The only rule is consistency—make sure to keep the same tone across your phrases.

Foreign languages probably offer the easiest source of arcane-sounding words for verbal components. Simply grab a translating dictionary and start looking up the spell names. Online translators make it even easier. Don't worry about an exact literal translation, worry about finding phrases that sound good to you. In French, *shield* becomes *bouclier* and *fireball* is *globe de feu*. The bonus with using real world foreign languages is the built-in consistency. The word for fire, for example, is always the same. *Globe de feu* (*fireball*) and *mur de feu* (*wall of fire*) sound similar because they both share the French word for fire (*feu*). This not only makes it easier to remember which component is which, but also adds to the realism of your components.

The Internet is littered with partially or fully rendered fantasy languages posted for free use. Searching for one of these languages and using it as the basis for your verbal components is yet another option. There might not be a translation for every word in every spell name, but you should be able to create something that sounds similar to the rest of the language you are using. Fantasy languages might require more creativity, but that is a small price to pay for the sense of wonder and awe your strange words will cause.

LANGUAGE RESOURCES

The following websites might aid you in creating arcane-sounding phrases or whole languages.

freetranslation.com
langmaker.com
members.aol.com/sylveri0n/dicttop.htm
zompist.com/kit.html

Short language translations exist in several past DRAGON issues. You can find these at **paizo.com/backissues**.

Draconic: DRAGON #284 (reprised in the *Draconomicon*)
Dwarven: DRAGON #278
Elven: DRAGON #279

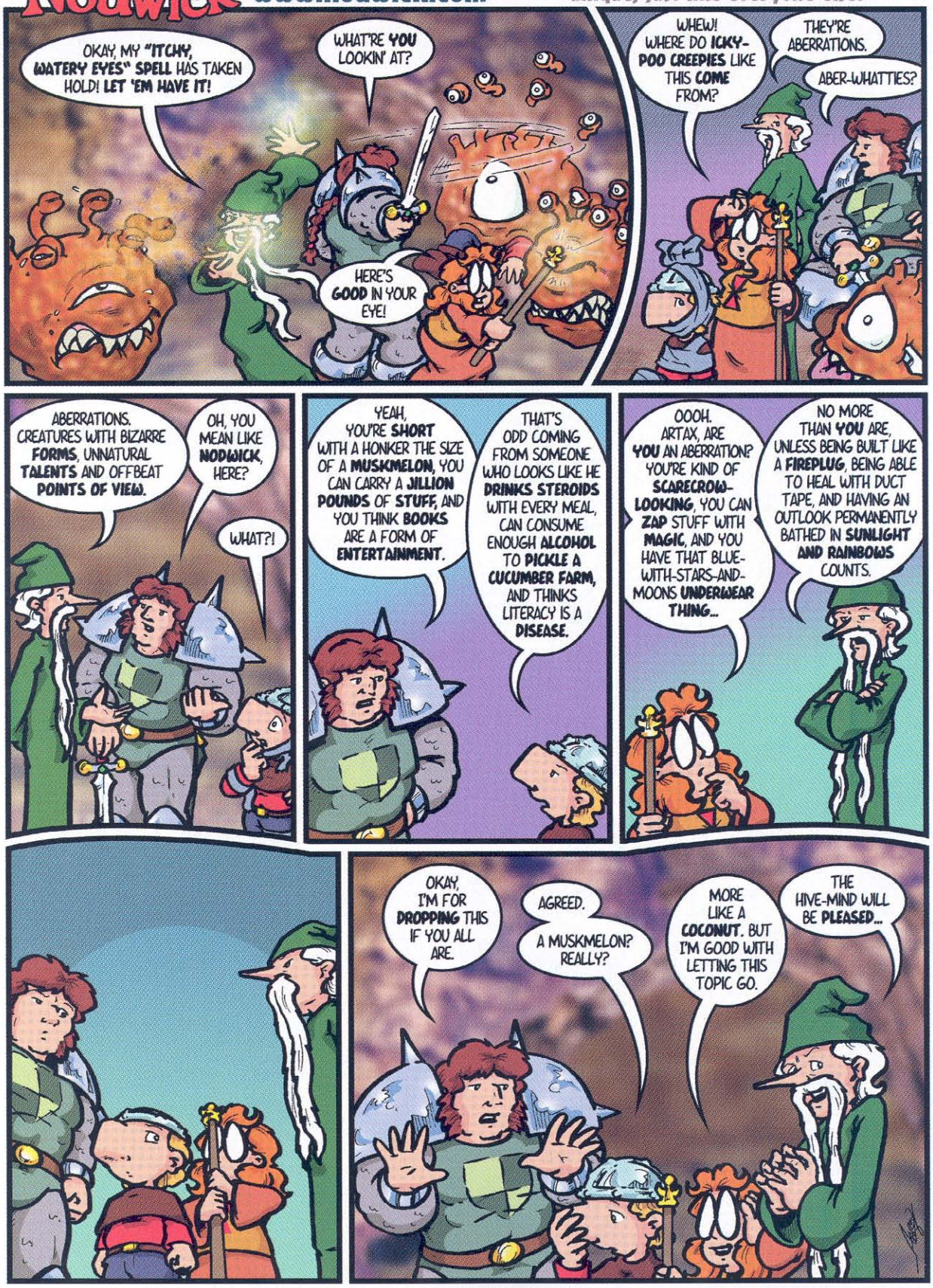
POWER PLAY: TINY TANKS

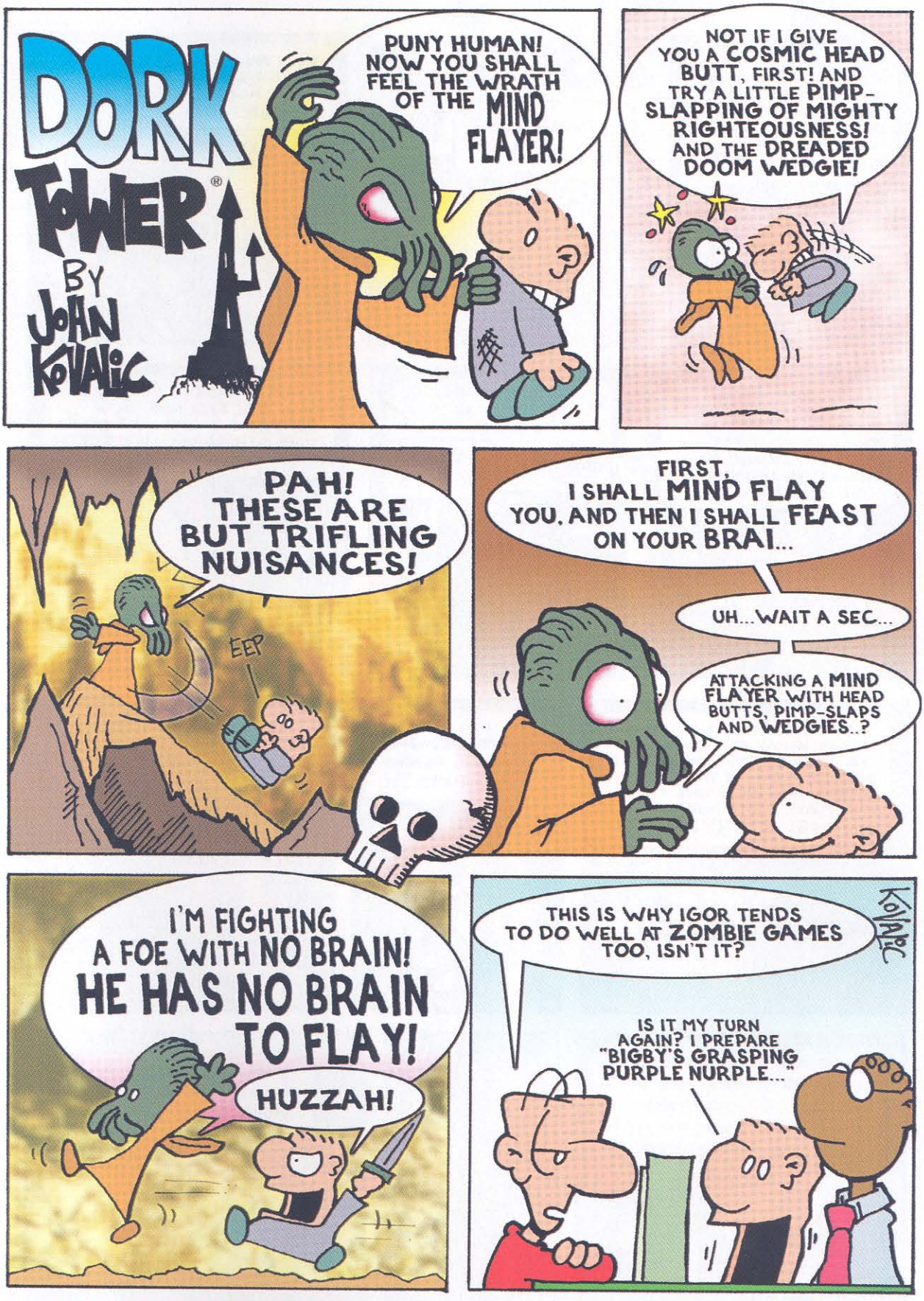
A particularly paranoid wizard, dedicating herself entirely to defense, can achieve an impressive Armor Class even at 1st level... and only at the cost of her stature. An unarmored halfling wizard specializing in abjuration with even just a 12 Dexterity begins play at AC 12. Casting *mage armor* (a +4 armor bonus), *shield* (a +4 shield bonus), and *reduce* (providing +2 size bonus to Dexterity and a +1 bonus to AC) raises the abjurer's AC to 22. With an 18 Dexterity, the Dodge feat, clerical aid in the form of *protection from evil* or *shield of faith* (both providing a +2 deflection bonus), and fighting defensively her AC might reach as high as 31.

Nodwick

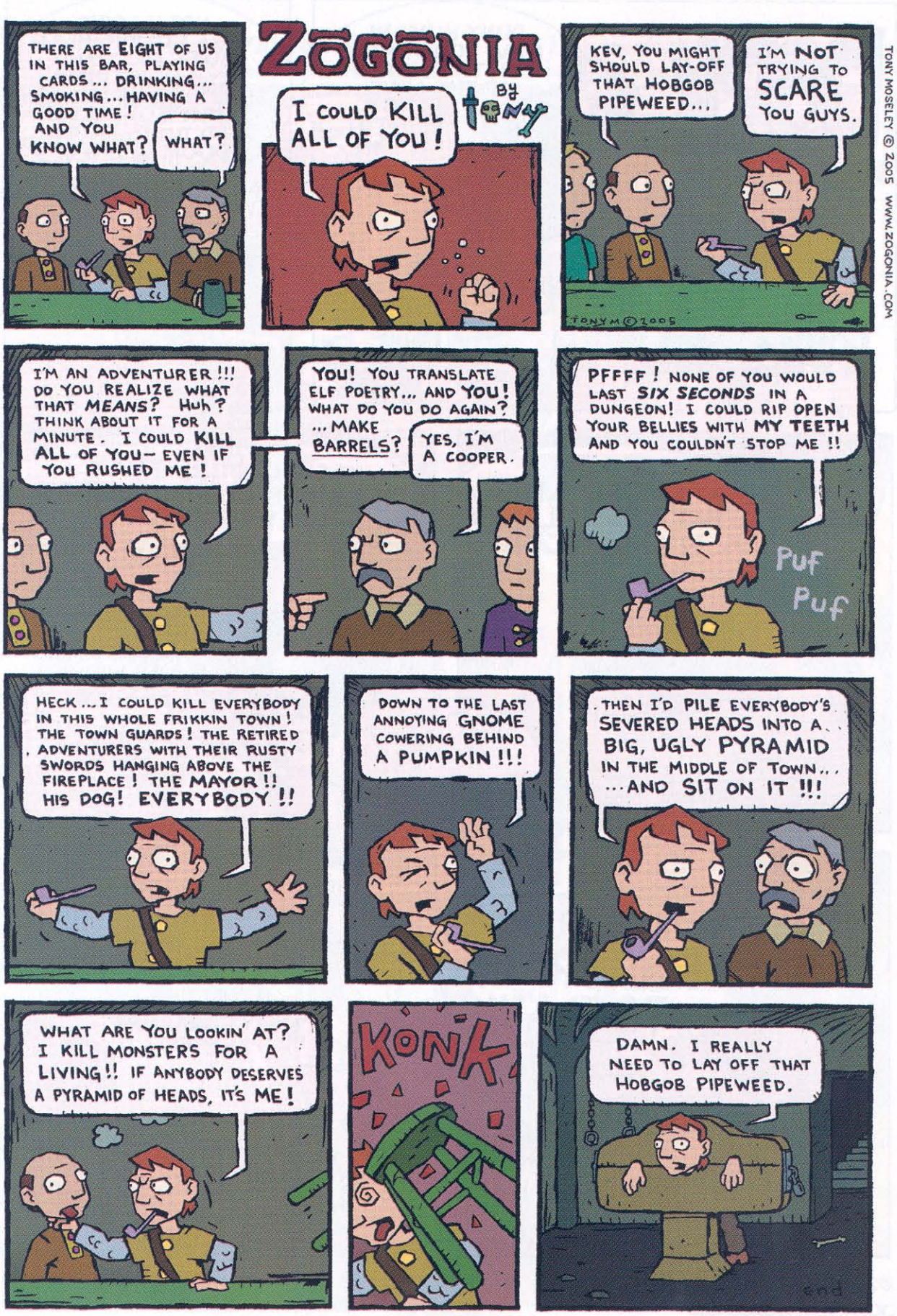
by Aaron Williams
www.nodwick.com

Always remember: You're unique, just like everyone else.





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ZOGONIA
BY TONY
THERE ARE EIGHT OF US IN THIS BAR, PLAYING CARDS... DRINKING... SMOKING... HAVING A GOOD TIME! AND YOU KNOW WHAT?
WHAT?
I COULD KILL ALL OF YOU!
KEV, YOU MIGHT SHOULD LAY-OFF THAT HOBGOB PIPEWEED...
I'M NOT TRYING TO SCARE YOU GUYS.
TONYM©2005
I'M AN ADVENTURER!!! DO YOU REALIZE WHAT THAT MEANS? Huh? THINK ABOUT IT FOR A MINUTE. I COULD KILL ALL OF YOU— EVEN IF YOU RUSHED ME!
YOU! YOU TRANSLATE ELF POETRY... AND YOU! WHAT DO YOU DO AGAIN? ...MAKE BARRELS?
YES, I'M A COOPER.
PFFFF! NONE OF YOU WOULD LAST SIX SECONDS IN A DUNGEON! I COULD RIP OPEN YOUR BELLIES WITH MY TEETH AND YOU COULDN'T STOP ME!!
Puf
Puf
HECK... I COULD KILL EVERYBODY IN THIS WHOLE FRIKKIN TOWN! THE TOWN GUARDS! THE RETIRED ADVENTURERS WITH THEIR RUSTY SWORDS HANGING ABOVE THE FIREPLACE! THE MAYOR!! HIS DOG! EVERYBODY!!
DOWN TO THE LAST ANNOYING GNOME COWERING BEHIND A PUMPKIN!!!
THEN I'D PILE EVERYBODY'S SEVERED HEADS INTO A BIG, UGLY PYRAMID IN THE MIDDLE OF TOWN... ...AND SIT ON IT!!!
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKIN' AT? I KILL MONSTERS FOR A LIVING!! IF ANYBODY DESERVES A PYRAMID OF HEADS, IT'S ME!
KONK
DAMN. I REALLY NEED TO LAY OFF THAT HOBGOB PIPEWEED.
end
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